

WE SHALL SHORTLY COMMENCE A SERIAL STORY BY A FAVOURITE AUTHOR.

THE LONDON READER

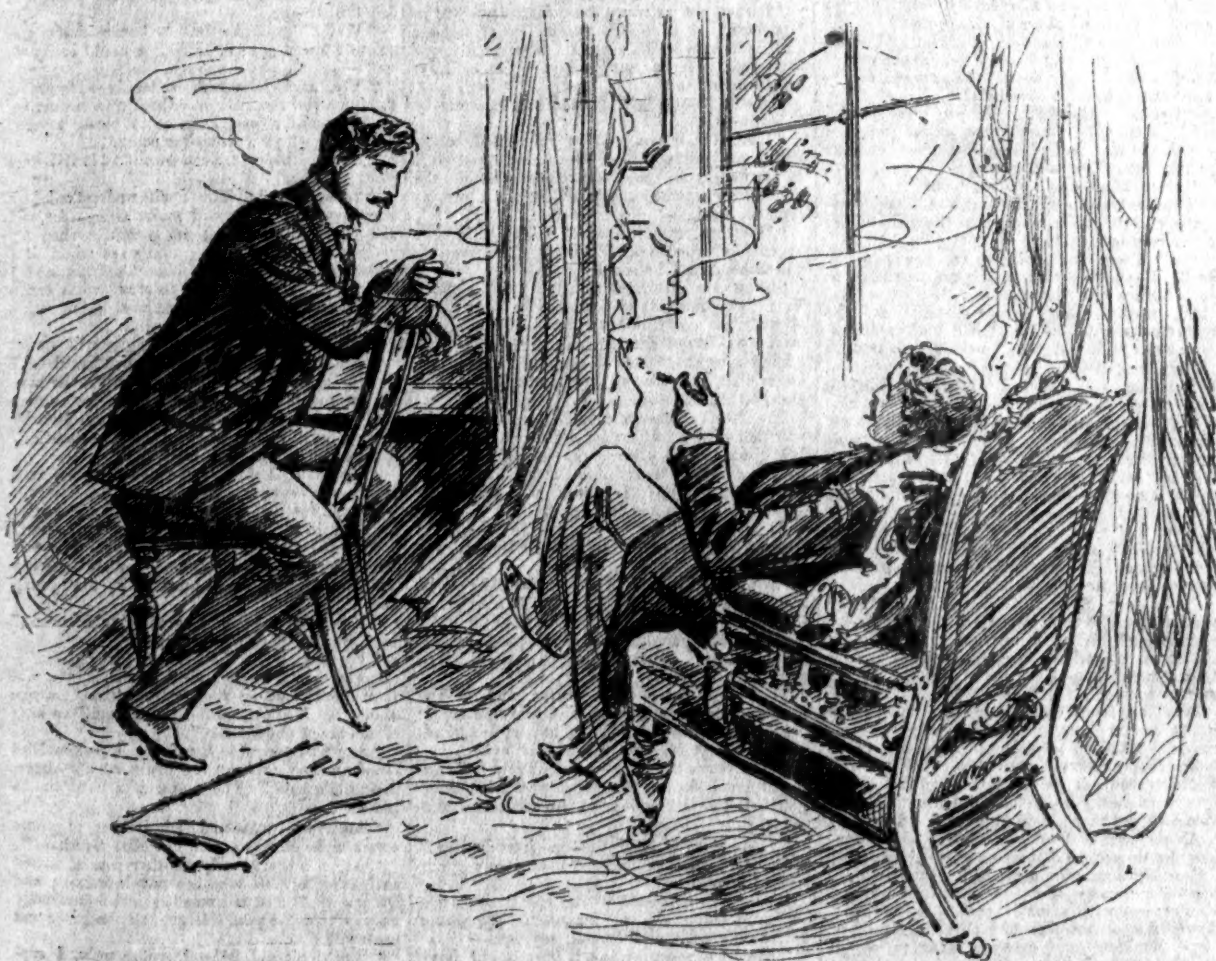
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"LOOK HERE, RONALD, I WON'T SUFFER ANY INTERFERENCE FROM YOU. WHAT IS IT TO YOU IF MISS GRESHAM WAS MY COMPANION?" SAID ARTHUR, SAVAGELY.

A TANGLED WEB

[NOVELETTE.]

By the Author of "Wicked Little Henry,"
"We Three Girls," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE schoolroom door was slowly opened, and a dark face appeared in the aperture.
"Have the children been good this morning, Miss Gresham?" asked a cheerful voice, belonging to the honest governess, gently.

"Then I am justified in asking for a holiday—"

"Oh, Ronald, how nice!" broke in the eldest pupil, a small rattle of ten. "Say we may have one, Miss Gresham—please do!"

"You had a holiday on Monday, Minnie."
"Ah! but this is a special occasion. Arthur is coming home, and I propose taking these youngsters to meet him. Let them go."

"Oh, do!" pleaded Minnie. "Arthur is our big brother, you know, and is away at Cambridge, and we haven't seen him since—since ever so long!"

The governess smiled.
"I suppose I must say yes, then, Minnie; but understand you are to have no more holidays before Christmas."

"Seven whole days off!" laughed Mr. Tem-

pest, advancing into the centre of the room. "What a terrible threat! Now, children, run away and dress very quickly, or we shall miss the train!" and as they hastened to obey, Ronald went nearer to the slender slip of a girl standing shy and confused before him.

"Will not you come, too, Miss Gresham?" he asked.

"I? Oh, no, thank you!" and it hurt the young fellow to see how surprised she was by his little kindness.

"But why not?" he urged. "The morning is simply delightful, and if you wrap up well you will not feel the cold."

"It is not that, Mr. Tempest, but Mrs. Verral would be displeased."

"I don't see why she should."

"I am only the governess, and do not stand upon your level," the girl answered, with a faint sound of bitterness in her sweet voice.

"You are a lady," the young man said, a trifle warmly; and then she made the following astonished reply:—

"I do not know what I am."

He stared at her a moment in unmitigated surprise; then, thinking she referred to her undefined position in the house, turned to another—and he hoped—less painful topic.

"When does your holiday commence?"

"I am not entitled to one, Mr. Tempest. I only came here a month ago."

"Then Christmas will be a dull time for you and your friends. It is a shame to keep you from home at such a time."

"I have neither friends nor home," and the quick tears rose to the lovely, wistful grey eyes. "I am all alone in the world."

"Forgive me," he said, quickly. "I seem born to wound you; and Heaven knows I would not willingly do so. I had no idea you were an orphan. Poor child!"

"Ronald, Ronald! Where are you?" called a thin, high-bred voice, at the sound of which the girl dashed aside her tears, and the young man, frowning, replied:—

"Here, aunt—in the schoolroom."

The next moment a lady entered, and casting one swift glance of anger at the girl, turned graciously to Ronald.

"What are you doing here, you naughty boy? Don't you know this room is sacred to the children and Miss Gresham?"

"I was waiting for the children," he answered, a trifle coldly. "But I will not trespass again, Aunt Agatha," and with a bow to the girl he left the room.

But Mrs. Verral stayed a moment behind to say quickly and insolently:—

"You understand, Miss Gresham, I do not allow my governesses to entertain any male guests here. A repetition of this offence will be very summarily dealt with," and allowing the girl no time to reply, she sailed from the room.

Then that poor young thing sank on a chair, and throwing her arms out before her, buried her tortured face upon them, and a shudder passed over the slender frame.

"Oh, dear Heaven!" she sighed, "why should there be such a difference between me and others? What is my fault? How could she speak so cruelly to me? I had done nothing to merit her anger, and a kind word is like manna to me."

With an impatient gesture she pushed the heavy brown hair from her temples, and, rising, walked to a window, where she stood long, looking down upon the lovely white world spread out before her. And the sweet eyes were heavy with unshed tears; the pale face had grown a shade paler and sadder.

As she stands there, so silent and motionless, let us see what manner of maid she is.

Scarcely above the medium height, but looking taller because of her extreme fragility and slenderness, with a small, pale face, upborne, flower-like, on a milk-white throat; a pair of large, luminous grey eyes; a sensitive, proud mouth, and clear-cut features of a very *spirituelle* type. And all about the broad brow, low upon the snowy neck, waved heavy masses of nut-brown hair. A beautiful girl, and only eighteen, with an air of melancholy, sad to see in one so young and fair.

Oh! it was bitter indeed to stand alone in the world—to have no friends, no home, no certain knowledge of her own identity. Surely, Mrs. Verral need not have added to her grief.

"It was with some such thought as this she turned at last from the window, hearing the sound of merry voices in the courtyard below.

So he had come at last—the darling son and heir; and as she listened to the joyous greetings Mary Gresham's heart and courage failed her, and sinking on her knees she cried:—

"Oh, Heaven! in mercy let me die! My desolation is more than I can bear!"

But she was not left long undisturbed. Swift, light steps approached the schoolroom, and,

starting up, the girl waited for Minnie to enter.

"Oh, Miss Gresham, Arthur has come, and he is going to stay with us a whole month; and, if you please, mamma says you're to go down to the library at once, she has some letters she wants you to write. And Lily Dorn-ton has come, and nurse says she is going to marry my brother Arthur. She is very rich, you know, and pretty; but not as pretty as you, only she has got money and you haven't, so people are sure to like her best." Then this small counterpart of Mrs. Verral disappeared, leaving Mary to follow as she would.

The girl went quickly downstairs, to find the lady of the house chatting to her young visitor, to whom she did not think it necessary to introduce her governess.

"I want you to write these invitations, Miss Gresham. I have left you a list of names, and I hope you will work industriously, as they must all be out to-day. Come, Lily, luncheon waits."

But the young lady paused in the doorway to say:—

"I am afraid you will be very tired before you have finished, Miss Gresham! I wish I could help you," and the pleasant smile she gave Mary warmed the poor, forlorn heart, so that she said:—

"How ungrateful I am! Twice I have heard kind words spoken to-day. The world is not so hard as I believed."

She wrote on industriously, and as Mrs. Verral's injunctions were not to be lightly disobeyed, she dared not stay to eat her mid-day meal; but about three o'clock wine and sandwiches were carried in to her, and she did not guess that this was at her new friend's (Mr. Tempest) instigation.

The short afternoon was closing in, and she was half afraid to ring for lights the servants being busy, and always careless of her summons; so she sat straining her eyes in a vain endeavour to finish her task, when the door opened, and a young man entered.

By the faint glow of the firelight she could not see his features, but, concluding it was Ronald, said:—

"If you please, Mr. Tempest, would you be so good as to ask for lights? I have some writing to finish, and it has grown so dark."

"You are mistaken," said a strange voice.

"I am Arthur. How stupid of mother not to warn me the library was occupied!"

Then he came a little nearer, and as the flames suddenly brightened and flickered across the exquisite face, a look of unmistakable admiration leapt into the bright blue eyes.

"It is very absurd, and abominably rude for me to say I do not remember you. We must perform the ceremony of introduction ourselves."

"There is no need for an introduction," Mary answered coldly. "I am only your sister's governess."

If she had expected to see his face change and grow colder she was mistaken. The young fellow only put out his hand, saying:—

"Then we must be good friends. I have heard a great deal of you, Miss Gresham, from Minnie and Dot. I cannot feel as though you are a stranger."

She glanced at the door, fearful lest Mrs. Verral should find them together, and place her own construction upon that innocent meeting. Then she said:—

"If you please, Mr. Verral, I have a number of notes to write yet."

"You wish me to go? Well, to hear is to obey, although I would rather stay here. This is a favourite room of mine. But I shall see you at dinner!"

"No; I dine with the children."

"But you surely put in an appearance in the drawing-room?"

"Yes, when my accompaniments are in request, not otherwise."

"What a shame! It isn't fair to keep you cooped up in such a fashion."

"Mr. Verral, will you please leave me?"

desperately. "I cannot afford to lose my situation, and your mother would be angry to find you here."

"I do not think so."

"I am sure of it. Please do not stay another moment," and something in the wistful sorrowful eyes compelled his obedience.

But all that night, he thought a great deal more than was wise or well of the lovely little governess, whose beauty so far eclipsed Lily Dorn-ton's.

He knew his mother's wishes regarding that young lady, but he was not at all prepared to gratify them, and felt highly indignant when he found she was constantly thrust upon him—his companion walking or driving, his partner at whist—the accompanist of his songs—and complained bitterly of these things to Ronald Tempest.

"Well," said the latter, "why don't you make a stand against it? You could easily do so."

"Yes, and have the matter in a towering rage for the next six months. She means me to marry Lily, and I mean to please myself, so we are playing cross-purposes."

"I would make a clean breast of it if I were you, Arthur."

"Would you? You don't understand how nasty my mother could make things for me. By my father's will I am a minor until my twenty-fourth birthday; and even then, if I marry to displease her, she takes all, and I nothing. Now, I put it to you, what can a fellow, brought up as I have been, do in such a case?"

"Either conform to his parent's will, or set to work manfully to earn an honest livelihood."

"It's all very well for you to talk, who have no one to please but yourself; but let us drop the unsavoury subject. By-the-way, Ronald, what a lovely little creature the governess is!"

"Do you think so?" coldly.

"By Jove, I do! Did you ever see such hair, such eyes and complexion? But she looks far too good for one so young and lovely. I am afraid she has known some great trouble."

"Probably she has known many. She told me only this morning that she is homeless and friendless. Only think of it, that young thing!"

"You seem to be on very confidential terms," said Arthur, rather irritably.

"We are not; I had not exchanged half-a-dozen words with her until this morning, and then your mother was tremendously savage about it, I know, although she said nothing to me about the matter."

"She was too wise for that. I reckon Miss Gresham had to bear the brunt of her anger, poor little soul! The matter is a hard one to please."

"And any expressed admiration of yours won't make things easier for Miss Gresham."

"Oh, I know! My mother has a rooted antipathy to girls who are not heiresses; and the worst of it is, the wealthy girl is unusually ugly, whilst the poor one gets all the grace and beauty."

"You don't call Miss Dorn-ton ugly, I suppose?"

"Oh, she is the exception that proves the rule; and, of course, I can see she is intended for me. But I have enough of my own (if the matter is reasonable) to dispense with a fortune with my wife. But let us talk of something else. I am sick of the subject."

The next night, as Mary sat alone, she received a message from Mrs. Verral to the effect that she was to go down to the drawing-room, being wanted to accompany some songs. She stole a look at herself in the little mirror, and sighed as her glance rested on the plain brown dress, the spotless collar and cuffs.

It was hard to have such a taste for pretty things, and yet be unable to gratify it; harder still to go down amongst those beautifully-dressed girls and matrons, to be with them but not of them.

Smoothing the rebellious hair with little white hands she turned, and went slowly down-

stairs, to enter the drawing-room shrinkingly, her fair face flushed with confusion, her eyes so downcast that she did not see the kindly smile Lily gave her. No one else noticed her, and she stole her way through the laughing throng to the piano.

Then Mrs. Verral spoke.

"You will accompany Mr. Mathie with 'The Scout,' Miss Greenham," and something in her tone drove the blood lustily into Mary's face, and over the fair, white throat.

Mr. Mathie sauntered towards the piano. There was no need for haste; the girl was only a governess, and not entitled to much consideration.

But, if he thought thus, there was one in the room who did not share his opinion. Ronald Tempest had risen, and now stood by Mary, altogether regardless of his aunt's frowning looks.

"Allow me," he said, courteously, and forthwith began to turn the leaves of music; and, somehow, his presence gave Mary a sense of rest and protection. No one but he heeded if she were weary, unless indeed it was Arthur, who stole furtive looks at her now and again, and she was faint with the duties of the day. Perhaps Ronald saw this, for in a pause of the playing, he said,—

"Let me bring you some coffee, Miss Greenham. You look half dead!"

"Oh, no!" she began, hurriedly. "Mrs. Verral would not like it."

But he was already away, and returning presently with the fragrant beverage bade her drink it; and, although she obeyed, she was miserably conscious that her employer's cold and cruel eyes were bent sternly upon her.

A little later Mrs. Verral called across the room.

"Your services are no longer required," she said, in an offensive tone. "You may go to your room. I am sorry you have so quickly forgotten my warning."

Glad to escape, the poor child hurried to her bare, little chamber; and there, falling on her knees, prayed Heaven that she might not be sent away, for she moaned,—

"I have no home! no home! and I dare not face the cruel world!"

She had hoped to be so happy here, and now she was so wretched that she thought of death with dreadful longing.

"At this season of the year all are glad but me," she murmured. "Oh, what a mockery all this mirth seems—to me!"

That night she cried herself to sleep.

The next morning Mrs. Verral took her nephew to task for his behaviour of the previous night.

"Really, Ronald, you made yourself quite conspicuous with Miss Greenham, and I do not think it kind to pay her attentions that must end in nothing. You will only injure the girl."

"I do not understand what you mean by 'attentions,' aunt!" the young fellow answered, proudly. "I was but ordinarily civil."

Mrs. Verral lifted her shapely shoulders.

"It was very pronounced civility!"

"Not nearly so pronounced as the insolence with which most of those present treated the poor girl. My blood boiled to see it!"

The lady's face flushed.

"You forget what you imply, Ronald. I behaved towards Miss Greenham as I should to any other inferior. I have no quixotic sentiments, and I do not believe in raising people above their level. Further, let me say a repetition of last night's nonsense will result in Miss Greenham's instant dismissal. I do not wish my nephew to make a *mésalliance*."

"You are looking far ahead; but let me say, aunt, now, that there may be no further misunderstanding between us, that if I chose I would marry your kitchen-maid, provided she were virtuous and not too hopelessly ignorant. Further, that I have never spoken one word to Miss Greenham that all the world might not hear; and it is a shameful thing to visit any shortcomings of mine upon her head," and with that he walked out of the room.

CHAPTER II.

In her own mind Mrs. Verral resolved that her male visitors should be allowed to see as little of the governess as possible.

"I won't have any nonsense of that kind take place in my house," she thought. "The girl shall keep her position; but I would rather not part with her—I won't unless compelled. She is clever and submissive; and she is very cheap, too. That is the advantage of having an orphan for a governess, only I wish she were not so remarkably pretty. Lily looks quite commonplace beside her!"

And then, it being Sunday morning, she went with her party to church, where her devotion was something wonderful to see. Mary sat in a little pew apart, with the two children; and one heart ached for her, one pair of eyes were full of compassion, noting her dejected looks, the shiver which occasionally passed over her, and which she could not wholly repress—for the church was cold, and her jacket too thin to impart any warmth. And close by sat the ladies in their velvets and furs; a little further off the country-women in their comfortable shawls, which Mary almost envied, but which were forbidden to one in her position. Her position, poor child! The veriest drudge there was happier and more fortunate than she!

She did not appear that day in the drawing-room, and Ronald Tempest was angry with himself that he thought so much of the pale girl, and longed so ardently to look in the deep, grey eyes, whose sadness so appealed to him. And on Monday evening he started early with Arthur to pay a visit to an old college friend. But their journey was destined to have a most disastrous end. Returning home the horse shied; and before Ronald, who was driving, could in any way control him, he slipped on the frozen snow, tried to recover himself, but failed, and the next moment he had thrown the young men, and was down on the road, kicking and plunging until the dog-cart was a wreck, and Ronald, who was only a little shaken, had rushed to his head and secured him. Then he turned to look for Arthur, only to find him lying quite still upon the road.

"Are you much hurt, old fellow?" he asked, anxiously, and slowly Arthur dragged himself erect.

"I feel as if I'm bruised to a jelly; and Jove!" with a groan, "I've broken my left arm."

"Nonsense, old chap! Perhaps it is only a severe sprain."

"Do you think that I'm such a fool as not to know the difference? And of course there isn't such a thing as a conveyance within a mile. You must lead the brute, Ronald, until we get to Flack's, leave him there, and I'll go on to old Hough's, and get this set."

"You're not fit to go alone," Ronald said, solicitously. "You look more like fainting than walking."

"Oh, I shall be all right; but I wish," with an oath, "that conformed beast had dropped dead in his stable before I got this hurt!"

But Ronald insisted upon accompanying his cousin; and, meeting a villager a little way from the scene of the accident, they entrusted the frightened beast to him, going on together to Dr. Hough's. And the bone being satisfactorily set, and Arthur nursed by a glass of cognac, they proceeded to the Manor, where the lamentations over the young man were loud and fearful.

Lily Dorton grew quite white, and her pretty blue eyes were full of such tenderness that Ronald felt afraid for her.

"Oh, what a fuss you women make!" Arthur said, petulantly. "For Heaven's sake leave me alone! I am all right!" and as if to give the lie to his words he quietly fainted away.

The swoon, however, was of short duration, and Arthur himself seemed little the worse the next morning for his accident. He was somewhat paler, and his eyes were rather languid,

but Lily privately thought that the pallor and languor made him but the more interesting.

All conspired to make much of him, and it was pleasant to lie on the luxurious couch and accept all caresses and attentions as his due. It flattered his self-love, and he began to think the rôle of invalid rather jolly then not.

A skating party had been arranged for the afternoon, but, owing to the accident, most of the guests suggested staying at home, only this Arthur would not hear of.

"He should prefer solitude. Perhaps he should sleep; his head ached so confoundingly that a dose would be good for him," and so on.

And then, as soon as the last guest was gone, and Mrs. Verral safely out of the way, this young man rose and deliberately threw himself into temptation. He knew where to find Mary, having heard his mother request her to decorate the schoolroom ready for the tableau vivants to be performed there on the morrow, the twenty-fourth; and so to the schoolroom he went.

He had not seen her often, but already he told himself he loved her with an endless passion, and that he would win her for himself despite all opposition.

As he entered the room he saw her standing on a chair, trying to place a large spray of holly over a picture which hung a little above her reach.

"Allow me!" he said; and, uttering a startled cry, she turned, looked down at the fair handsome face, and read something so new, so strange, in the bright blue eyes that her own fell, and a swift blush crimsoned her face and throat.

"Thank you, I have succeeded at last!" she said, nervously, and got down from her perch. "How is my work progressing?"

"Beautifully! You must be a real genius, Miss Greenham; but cannot I help you?"

"Oh, no! I have nearly finished now, and Mrs. Verral forbids the gentlemen to enter this room."

"Does she? Well, I am the son of the house, not a visitor, so that makes a difference. I don't count. And if you knew how awfully lonely it is downstairs, how sick I am of my own society, you would not wish me to go. I am an invalid, and so must be humoured."

"I was sorry to hear of your accident," she said, very gently. "Does your arm pain you much, Mr. Verral?"

"Not now, or if it does I am able to forget it. Do you know, when all those women were making such an awful fuss last night over me I only wanted you—to hear you say what now you have said, 'I am sorry.'"

"Mr. Verral!" in a startled tone. "You must not talk in that way to me. I am a poor governess!"

"I don't care what you are. I know what I think you," he answered, whilst that same "light-fire in the veins of a boy" leapt to fiercer life. "And I have been waiting for a chance to tell you how much I wish to be your friend; how ardently I have looked forward to this meeting!"

Poor, foolish, fluttering heart! Hungering and thirsting for love, how it throbbled in the girl's bosom, until its rapture was almost pain!

Under the influence of this new feeling her face grew very pale; even the lusty red faded from the pretty lips, and a sensation of faintness stole over her.

The young man marked her agitation with a thrill of passionate triumph; but the time was young yet to speak, and she was frightened. So his next words were more temperate, his tone less ardent.

"If it will help you any," he said, "to speak to me of your past, of the home, and the friends I understand you have lost, do not hesitate to do so. I should be proud—oh most proud and glad—to feel I had your confidence and your esteem. Won't you promise to look on me as your friend?"

She was still trembling, and her voice was hardly audible as she answered:—

"I do, indeed, believe you are my friend,

strange as it seems. You see, I have never known much kindness; I have never known what it is to have a home or dear ones. In all the world I stand alone.

"Not alone any more, whilst I have life and breath."

The sweet lips quivered, and the wistful, beautiful eyes mutely thanked him.

"You are very, very good." But I think before you promise so much, I ought to tell you that there is a dark mystery surrounding me; that, for aught I know to the contrary, I may be a beggar's child, taken out of charity, educated by charity, launched into the world by charity.

The startled look he turned on her struck coldly on her heart; but in a moment he recovered his ordinary manner.

"Tell me what you mean! Tell me all, Miss Gresham?"

"The all is very little. When I was only three years old a lady took me to Miss Samborne's academy, and there left me. She stated that I was the child of some people she had known, and for whose sakes she had charged herself with my maintenance until such a time as I could earn my own livelihood. But, as I had no money, should never inherit any, as soon as I was old enough to be made useful she wished that I should help in the instruction of those younger than myself, as it was her intention (provided I had ability sufficient), to start me in life as governess. And after a great deal of bargaining she paid Miss Samborne a large sum of money to cover all expenses incurred up to my eighteenth birthday. She gave her name as Montpensier, and promising to call once a year to satisfy herself of my progress, she drove away, and from that day until now has neither been seen nor heard of, although Miss Samborne instituted inquiries about her."

"Upon my word," Arthur said, gaily, "your story sounds like a romance. For aught you know you may be a princess in disguise!"

"Or the child of some terrible criminal," she added, sadly. "And this very uncertainty, this awful horror of one day discovering myself to be the offspring of evil parents, weighs upon my spirits, and darkens all my life!"

"You poor girl! But I will not believe such dreadful things. I prefer to draw my own conclusions. Why, Miss Gresham, that woman's very secrecy and non-appearance incline me to believe that, for some purpose of her own, she wrested you from your parents and most successfully hid you from them."

"You are saying this out of kindness and compassion to me."

"On my honour, no! More extraordinary things than this have happened even within my very limited experience; and, to use a hackneyed phrase, 'truth is stranger than fiction.' And now, how shall I thank you for your confidence?"

"All thanks are due to you," she answered, with lowered lids.

"If you mean that—really mean it—you will grant me one little favour. I will be moderate in my demand."

"What is it, Mr. Verral?"

"That you will let me see you sometimes—not too often, but—"

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot! If Mrs. Verral discovered our meeting she would instantly dismiss me."

"She need not know; I will be very careful. And it is hard indeed if friends may never exchange greetings! You will consent—you must!"

"Do not tempt me," she pleaded, "do not teach me to deceive your mother!" and she knew if he urged her further she should yield to his desire. He was already so dear to her—and she was all alone!

"I shall quote Byron to you soon," he said, gaining possession of her hands. "Why should your heart

"It's flintiness prove

On none, till it proved it to me?"

"But—but," she faltered, "I thought—I have heard that gentlemen only despise girls

who meet and walk clandestinely with them!"

"You have been listening to a great deal of nonsense," severely. "It is not as though we do not know each other's antecedents, and when my mother learns all your goodness, all your graces, she will be pleased to sanction our friendship."

"Oh, no! never that. Already she regards me with suspicion and dislike."

"No, no; and even if that were so she is not the controller of my actions. Why will you be so obdurate? At least promise if by chance we meet you will not run away, or avoid me as if I had the plague?"

"I will promise so much," with a half-sad smile, and with this concession he feigned content, but inwardly he resolved to make those "chance" meetings very frequent.

"You have made me your debtor for life," he said, and longed to kiss some colour into those pure, pale cheeks, but would not frighten Mary by such violent wooing.

Just for to-day he kept strict watch and ward over himself, and when he left her, contented himself with pressing his lips to one small hand.

"She is peerless," he thought, as he went slowly and reluctantly downstairs, "and I love her! love her! love her! with all my soul. To think that I should be so easily bowled over—I who have flirted with a dozen or more pretty girls, and never felt the least little bit of a heart-throb for one! There'll be a dence of a row when the mater knows I mean to marry her; but she is so fond of me she can't hold out long against us. Poor, lonely little darling! I wonder who she really is! But I don't care a fig whether she is a king's or a scavenger's daughter, so long as she remains her own sweet self."

The morning of the twenty-fourth was bright and still frosty; so at breakfast Arthur announced his intention of running over to Hallingford, the nearest town.

"My dear Arthur," remonstrated Mrs. Verral, "do you think you are wise?"

"Pon my soul, mother, I don't know," laughing, "but if you mean will the journey hurt me, I say, most emphatically, 'no!' And I want to get some things for the youngsters. Pray look on me in the light of a benevolent Santa Claus, Miss Dorton."

"You are not venerable enough for the character. But could you not commission Mrs. Verral and I to make your purchases?"

"No; that would not do at all. I must go myself."

"I will go with you, Arthur," Roland said; and Arthur, who really wished, for reasons of his own, to go alone, was compelled to accept the offer with the best grace he could.

So they took train to Hallingford, and surely no young man ever hung so perplexedly about the shops as did Arthur.

He had purchased enough toys for half-a-dozen children, and still did not seem content, and when Ronald paused before a bookseller's, he said, hastily:—

"Look here; the time is flying—suppose you make your purchase whilst I go over the way! I want to get something for my mother," and waiting for no remonstrance he hurried across to the jeweller's.

He wanted something for Mary, and, much as he regretted it, he knew that something must not be sufficiently expensive to attract attention to the wearer.

"I want some pretty gift for a young lady; it must be good, but not showy. What would you recommend?"

"You might have a locket, sir—or, stay, if you want something really unique, this cross would suit you. The style is so uncommon, the work so delicately lovely!" and he produced a small gold cross for Arthur's inspection.

He had not praised it too highly, for running up the centre was a spray of minute passion-flowers, wrought so perfectly that one could but wonder at the skill and ingenuity of the artist.

Arthur did not hesitate a moment.

"Thank you," he said; "I will decide upon this. And now, if you will pack it, and oblige me with pen and ink, I shall be glad."

The little packet was sealed and addressed, and Arthur was inspecting some filagree bracelets when Ronald joined him.

"What an unconscionable time you are!" said the latter. "Make haste, or we shall have the pleasure of walking home."

"I am ready now," he answered, selecting a bracelet for his mother, and some quaint charms for Lily. "I say, old man," as they turned out of the shop together, "what have you bought?"

"Books," laconically.

"Of course, idiot! But what books?"

"Old Moore's Almanac," "Watts' Hymns," and "Paul and Virginia."

Arthur burst out laughing.

"What nice, suitable gifts for this festive season! But, of course, old boy, you have a right to be secret, if you choose, and my curiosity is rightly punished."

He was in the maddest of spirits all the way home, laughing hilariously, and talking incessantly, careless that Ronald scarcely answered his mad sallies, and seemed much preoccupied.

All that evening, too, he was the gayest of that gay party, and his heart beat fast as he thought:—

"What will she say? How will she look when she knows I have thought of her—my darling! my darling!"

Christmas morning came at last—the old, proverbial Christmas, with ice and snow; and in honour of the day the children were allowed to take breakfast with Mrs. Verral, so that Mary ate here alone.

Beside her plate, to her intense surprise, were two packets, the one small, the other of much larger dimensions; but as her eyes fell upon the smaller of the two a great wave of light and colour flooded her face.

She knew the handwriting; and, oh! what rapture it was to feel that even on such an occasion as this, when so much occupied with pleasure and his guests, he had not forgotten her.

What tears were shed upon the golden symbol! What happy, happy prayers rose from that innocent heart!

And how could she tell that before another Christmas she would curse this hour, and loathe the donor of the gift?

Then, how kind it was of Mr. Tempest to remember her! and she touched the two beautifully-bound volumes of Rossetti's poems with loving hands. The frontispiece was a faithful picture of the "blessed Danseol," and when he bought it Roland thought the face was like Mary's.

CHAPTER III.

Never had such a happy day dawned for the poor little wail. She was no longer lonely and sad—no longer conscious of her meagre attire, which was all uncalculated to keep out the biting cold. She was living—moving in a dream; and when she came downstairs with the children, all ready dressed for church, one or two visitors looked at her in wonder and admiration.

What had come to the little pale governess? She was always beautiful, but now, with that light in her eyes, that beautiful glow upon her cheeks, she was irresistible. Even Minnie noticed the change.

"How nice you look, Miss Gresham!" she said. "Have you had any presents to make your Christmas happy?"

"It is a happy season, Minnie!" she answered, evasively.

"How can it be when you sit up in that stupid room all alone, and have no friends come to see you, and no pretty new things? I know I should be miserable!"

"Hush, Minnie, we are almost in church now."

The joyous service well accorded with her happy frame of mind; and where he sat

Arthur could hear the sweet, clear voice joining in the old familiar hymns, which meant so much more to the girl than ever they had done before. He could watch every varying expression of that beautiful, mobile face; and once he met the grateful gaze of those luminous eyes, which drooped before the answering look in his.

He hoped she wore his gift, although he caught no gleam of gold upon the breast. He felt she would know instinctively who was the sender, and wondered how she looked, and when it was delivered into her hands. He was almost as sorry as she was when the service ended, and the ladies trooping out bore him with them to the waiting carriages.

Mrs. Verral paused in the porch, and bidding Mary lift the children up beside her, settled herself comfortably in her barouche, leaving the governess to perform the homeward journey alone, and on foot.

The blood flushed Arthur's fair face as he turned to Lily.

"What a thundering shame!" he said, indignantly. "If I were my mother I would not behave in such a way to a dog."

"Poor girl!" said Miss Dornton, "it is hard to make such a distinction. I am afraid she must feel it very bitterly."

"You would not place your governess on an equality with your guests?" questioned Arthur's *vis-à-vis*, a lady of uncertain age.

"Why not, Miss Mortlock? Is not the governess usually a lady too?"

Miss Mortlock shrugged her thin shoulders contemptuously.

"I wonder if you would be quite so chivalrous if Miss Gresham were old and ugly. I really think, Mr. Arthur, I must warn Mrs. Verral of the great interest you have in her."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Lily, so earnestly and anxiously that Arthur's heart warmed to her.

"Of course you would be jesting; but, with all due deference to Mrs. Verral, I am afraid she has no sense of humour, and she would not accept your words in deadly earnest, so that matters would go hardly with that poor girl."

"Of course I was joking," said the other, who, being perfectly indifferent to Mary, let her severely alone. "You are needlessly alarmed."

Meanwhile our heroine had started briskly for the Manor; but soon her pace slackened, and losing herself in her dream of happiness she progressed very slowly indeed.

She uttered a little startled cry when a voice close by said, "Miss Gresham," and lifting her eyes she saw Ronald Tempest. He had not accompanied the others to church on some plausible excuse or other; but from the first he had intended to waylay Mary, if only to wish her the compliments of the season.

"I could not bear to think of you spending all to-day alone, eating out your heart with vain and cruel longings," he said, gently; "so I ventured to meet you. You are not angry?"

"Oh no! how could I be, when you are so kind to me?"

"What has happened? You do not look nearly so sad as I feared you would, and yet your loneliness must be intensified to-day?"

"I am hardly conscious that I am lonely," gently. "I am so happy; and, Mr. Tempest, I want to thank you for your kind remembrance of me—your generous and beautiful gift. I was so far from hoping or expecting any present."

"Then it did please you to know I thought of you?" eagerly.

"Yes," she answered, frankly, all unconscious of the construction he would place upon her words. "It is good to find oneself kindly remembered. And I have so often wanted those very books, but they have always been beyond the limits of my purse!"

Then, as she thought of the costly volumes, with their handsome aesthetic bindings, the clear type and paper "thick as a board," her face flushed deeply. "But I am afraid I am wrong to accept them; they must have cost you so much money!"

He laughed a pleasant, musical laugh, good to hear.

"Oh, don't worry about such trifles. It is not often I play 'Santa Claus.' I leave all those little graceful acts to Arthur; they sit well upon him. And pray how do you propose spending the remainder of the day?"

"In reading, unless I am wanted downstairs; and, Mr. Tempest, your kindness makes me bold to ask a favour of you. If I am called down I want you not to appear to see me. I am grateful—oh, most grateful—to you for your courtesy; but indeed it only makes life here harder for me."

"I can't stay in the room and behave like a cad to you," he said, impetuously. "I should deserve to be kicked if I did!"

"But indeed—!" Mary began, when he interrupted her unceremoniously.

"If you come down that will be the signal for me to leave the room. I shall feel like a cur sneaking away in that fashion! But I cannot remain and witness the shameful treatment you bear so meekly and uncomplainingly. I wish I had a mother! She should rescue you from this drudgery and harsh treatment!"

"She might share Mrs. Verral's prejudice against me."

"If she did I'd disown her!"

Mary laughed outright, and the young man looked at her with pleased eyes.

"I believe you are happy to-day!" he said, with conviction. "And I shall have less compunction in leaving you when we reach home."

"You must leave me now, if you please. We are within sight of the Manor."

"But I hate to do it!" he answered, flushing uneasily. "It has such a cowardly, clandestine appearance! It looks as though we are ashamed to be seen together."

"I am not ashamed but afraid to be seen with you, Mr. Tempest. It is for my own sake I now ask you to say good-bye."

"Then, however reluctantly, I will obey. Good-bye, Miss Gresham. All happy thoughts go with you!"

He pressed her hand gently, and the next moment she found herself alone.

All the long afternoon she spent in alternately reading and dreaming.

Now and again faint sounds of merriment came borne to her where she sat; but she was not envious of the mirth and jollity, being so absorbed in the contemplation of her own happiness.

A neat maid brought her a dainty tea, and looking with that pity the season begets upon the young governess, said—

"It's hard for you, miss, I must say. Down in the servants' hall we're having as good times as the folks upstairs; and I do say the mistress ought to ask you to join 'em."

"I am happier by myself, Jane."

"Well, that's queer taste!"

But as she went downstairs she thought,—

"I believe, for all her quiet ways, Miss Gresham's got a bean. I quite forgot them two parcels she got this morning. Depend on it, she's happy enough thinking over them."

The shadows filled the room, but Mary did not light the lamp.

It was pleasant to watch the glowing embers, and to see pictures there—pictures of a happy future, of a young and loyal lover, of herself no longer lonely and neglected.

Oh, yes; she was quite content.

In the drawing-room the ladies were languidly playing fashionable games, pending the arrival of the gentlemen; and Arthur, taking advantage of the time, stole out of the room upstairs to where Mary was sitting.

"Hush!" he said, warningly, as he entered. "I have only a few minutes to spare; but I could not let the day go by without seeing you alone."

She had risen trembling and confused; and now he advanced with outstretched hand, into which she laid her little slender fingers.

Retaining possession of them, the young man said—

"Let me look at you, Mary. You little witch! what have you done to yourself? You are lovelier than ever—no, do not turn away! After a fast a man hungers, and it seems ages since we stood together here! Mary, why don't you wear my gift?"

At that she flushed more rosy than before. "It is too costly for me, Mr. Verral."

"No, no. And don't you know how glad I should be to learn it had found favour in your sight—that when you looked at it you would remember the giver, whose whole heart went with the gift?" And now he had thrown his arm about her, and was holding her fast whilst he kissed the sweet lips once.

"Mr. Verral! What have you done? Oh! let me go!"

"Call me Arthur—tell me you love me, and I will do anything you ask! You do love me, darling—is it not so?"

Unschooling in any wiles, untutored to hide her passion, full of adoring gratitude to this man, who had come to feed her hungry heart, she turned to him with a pathetic gesture.

"Arthur, I love you! I love you!" and shivered with the force of this new emotion.

He kissed her again and again; he called her by every fond, endearing name in the lover's vocabulary. And when further stay was dangerous, he tore himself reluctantly away, and went downstairs with a very thoughtful face.

He had not meant to be so precipitate, but Mary's beauty had been all too great for his self-control, and now he found himself pledged to her by every vow and every instinct of honour.

"There will be a row when all is known," he thought. "But I'll be true to her in spite of all opposition. I could not bear my life now without her."

He was so quiet all that night that Ronald rallied him upon his gravity, and Lily watched him with anxious eyes.

He was thinking how to break the news of his engagement to Mrs. Verral, and how soon it would be necessary to do so; but he could arrive at no definite decision, and retired at last in a perplexed and uneasy frame of mind only to fall into a troubled sleep.

But he woke in the morning blithe as a lark, and having contrived to slip a note under the schoolroom door, went down to breakfast with the air of a man who has done his duty.

The note was short and unsigned—undressed.

"Go to Hallingford by the twelve train. Will join you there."

And as Mary read it her face grew troubled, and a vague sense of shame possessed her.

Much as she loved him, fully as she trusted him, her heart recoiled from concealment and deceit, even for his sake.

And in some way it seemed to her she would be degraded in her own eyes and his if she consented to stolen meetings and clandestine interviews.

But she was slave to his will, and she told herself that perhaps Arthur wished to consult her upon the ways and means for winning Mrs. Verral to their side.

Her time was at her own disposal—at least, for this one day, and long before twelve o'clock came she had determined to go to Hallingford.

She dressed herself with the utmost care, and remembering Arthur's wish, fastened his gift to a narrow band of velvet, and wore it about her throat.

There were very few passengers to the sleepy town, and on her arrival the platform was all but deserted.

Arthur was waiting for her, his fair, handsome face bright with happiness and love. It was easy to see his conscience was at rest.

"How good of you to come, darling!" he said. "I was half afraid at the last you would fail me. Now, to reward you, I am going to make this day the happiest you have known."

"Where are we going?" she asked, as he hurried her towards a cab.

"To a dear, old-fashioned inn just outside the town, where I have ordered luncheon for

two. You see, sweetheart, I have so much to say to you, and we could not hope for an uninterrupted interview at home!"

"No," she said, flushing deeply; "and this air of mystery and deceit is painful to me. Arthur, when will you tell Mrs. Verral?"

He looked vexed a moment, then his face cleared up again as he answered, gently—

"Very soon, my darling, but at present it is not politic. Can't you trust me fully, Mary?"

"You know that I can! But, oh! if she should discover our secret, and how we have deceived her, she will never forgive us."

He thought it very probable she never would under any circumstances; but he did not say so. He only put his arm about the slender waist and spoke persuasively.

"Sweetheart, I feel I am asking a great deal of you, but I have such faith in your love for me that I am not afraid you will disappoint me. Just now it would be madness to divulge anything. She is so set upon my marriage with Lily Dorton; and beside that, to tell the truth, she has some claim to my consideration. It was only last month she settled all claims against me at Cambridge. I had been more extravagant than I ought; but now—having you to think of, I shall be careful. I mean to work like the proverbial black when I go up again, and then, when she is most pleased at my application and success, I shall tell her the whole story."

"But," said Mary, in dismay, "that will be three long months. How shall I bear to meet her daily, knowing how I am deceiving her?"

"Oh!" airily; "you will get used to that sort of thing; and it is a very innocent deception. Darling, it is for my sake!"

He could not have used a better plea.

"It is against my conscience," she said, almost with a sob, "but I cannot act in opposition to your will. Oh, Arthur, how I wish for your sake I were wealthy and well-born!"

"Of course that would smooth matters," he answered, cheerfully; "but I, for one, don't intend looking on the dark side of things. Here is our inn, Mary, and now for the rest of the day let me see your dear face as I saw it last night, transfigured with love and happiness."

And although for the moment her heart was heavy, she smiled up into the handsome face and sunny eyes.

The comfortable landlady met them in the porch of the picturesque inn, beautiful even in its winter garb; and led the way to a cosy room, where quite an epicurean repast was served.

Oh, that happy, happy time! In the day when she should become a wanderer and an outcast, the thought of it would make her sick and blind. But no foreboding of woe was on her then. Under the influence of Arthur's love, and Arthur's smiles, she forgot all but her own great blessings; and was so bright, so winsome, that the young fellow was more than ever infatuated with her.

What dreams they dreamed! What plans they planned, never else to be carried out! What pathetic faith she had in him, and how strong he then believed his love! Alas for the maid.

"If you live you must love, if you love despair," only as yet Mary would not believe this, even if one came from the dead to warn her.

The hours flew all too fast. It was time to return home long before they were weary of each other, or aware how quickly the moments flew. All their plans for future meetings were now complete, and when they reached the little home station there was nothing further to say than good-bye. Only Arthur insisted upon walking a little way with Mary; then pausing in a secluded part of the road he took her in his arms, and kissed her passionately again and again.

"Oh, my darling, how hard it is to part!" And her own heart echoed his words. "Have you been happy to-day? Have you had anything left to desire?"

"Happy! Oh, Arthur, for the first time in

my life I have lived; before I but existed. Good-night, good-night! dear heart! Heaven bless you for your love and goodness to me!"

Then he let her go, her last words ringing in his ears, her last smile lingering with him yet.

Mary was fortunate enough to enter the house unobserved, and, hurrying to her room, was down upon her bed and gave herself up wholly to her dream of love. But to Arthur's annoyance, when he reached his own apartment, he found Ronald there, looking very fierce and moody.

"Arthur," he said, abruptly, "I am not given to beating about the bush, so I may as well tell you I know who was your companion at Hallingford. I saw you both on the platform just now, and took a nearer cut home, because I did not wish even to seem to intrude. But I ask you, are you playing a manly part towards that poor girl?"

"I'll knock the fellow over who denies it," savagely. "Look here, Ronald, I won't suffer any interference from you; let my affairs alone, or we shall quarrel. What is it to you if Miss Gresham was my companion?"

CHAPTER IV.

"This, that I will not stand by and see an orphaned, friendless girl made the sport for your idle moments. As for making her the subject of a vulgar brawl, I would scorn to do it."

"Listen a moment," Arthur said, more temperately; "my heart ached to think of her loneliness, and her sad little face haunted me. I thought I would give her an unexpected pleasure. Surely no reasonable soul could object to that?"

"Not even your mother, or Miss Dorton?"

"The former has no right of control over me; the latter does not yet claim me as her own particular property. So I say again, I shall act as I please with regard to Miss Gresham."

"And I say you shall not," in a white heat. "I'll stand between you; you shall not break her heart and spoil her life."

"I don't intend to," coolly. "I mean to marry her if she will have me."

"What!"

"Oh, you're not obliged to believe me unless you choose; but I am in earnest, I can assure you."

"Does Mrs. Verral know this?" in a hard voice.

"Not at present. You don't suppose I am going to speak before I am sure of winning Mary!"

"If you love her honourably I have no more to say; if you fail her, you may know what to expect," and the honest face looked quite aged and worn in the uncertain light. "I could have wished her to choose one less unstable and variable than yourself; but you have a way that wins upon women."

"Upon my soul, I believe you love Miss Gresham yourself!"

"I do," coolly, "and until she decides between us I warn you I shall try to win her for myself."

"Does Miss Gresham know of your pretensions?" haughtily.

"No; I am not such a fool as to injure my cause by any premature declaration," and he walked out of the room, leaving Arthur with a smile on his face.

He could afford to be complacent, having won the prize his cousin so coveted; and if anything had been wanting to give completion to his love, to lend zest to his wooing, it was just the knowledge that he had a rival—and Ronald, with his unnumbered estate and fine income was a formidable one.

He was very careful in his conduct with regard to Mary. Astute and suspicious as Mrs. Verral was, she never dreamed of those secret meetings, the vows exchanged, the love which grew with each day. And if Miss Gresham was more than ever anxious to please, more

than ever attentive to her duties, she never thought of inquiring or looking for the cause. And thus things were on the last day of Arthur's stay, when he had an audience with his mother.

"Arthur," she said, "you know my wishes concerning you and Lily. What are you going to do?"

"What is it you wish?" he asked, his face clouding suddenly.

"That when you leave here Lily shall be your affianced wife."

"What! Do you mean I am to pop the question to-day?"

"If you choose to put it so inelegantly, yes. Where is the use of delay?"

"Oh, hang it, mother, I can't! Let things stand over until I come home again!"

"Which will not be until June. You apparently forget you spend your Easter vacation abroad. It is not likely a girl of spirit will wait for such a laggard in love as you."

He smiled significantly.

"Look here, mother, I don't want to vex you; and you, on your part, must not harass me into the thing. I promise you I'll say something pretty to little Lily, that will keep her contented until June."

He looked so handsome, standing there with his head well thrown back, a half-insolent, half-mocking smile upon his lips, that, with a sigh, Mrs. Verral said:—

"I suppose I must be content; but I confess I am disappointed. I really do not see why you should so strongly object to an engagement. You are twenty-three now!"

"That is a shocking age," he answered, laughing. "I ought to feel like a Methuselah, whereas I don't believe I've sown half my wild oats yet. But you may rest satisfied, mother, that I will do my best to please you," and he then went away to keep his tryst with Mary.

"Darling!" he said, catching her close, "how pale you are! And you have been crying! I declare you look as woe-begone as though you were losing your whole world!"

"And am I not? Are you not my world?" she asked, tremulously, and clung to him in a passion of sorrow.

Her simple faith, her adoring love, were as incense to his vanity. Ah! no one would ever love him so well as did this grey-eyed girl, to whom one day he would prove a traitor and a rogue; and yet whom, through all his weakness, his sin against her, his public renunciation of her, he would still love.

"I have not much time to spare, sweetheart, so you must pay the greatest attention to my last instructions. You must not flirt with Ronald. He loves you. Did not you know?" as the girl gave a startled exclamation. "I am a jealous fellow, and I will not share your love, your favours, with another!"

"Arthur, am I not wholly yours?"

"I hope so—I know so. But you are young. Ronald is rich, and free to please himself, and he isn't bad-looking. Well, having disposed of that subject I will just speak briefly about our letters. We will write twice a week, you on Saturdays and Wednesdays, I on Sundays and Thursdays; and you will remember always to call at the post-office for yours."

"Yes, I will remember. But, oh, Arthur, how happy I should be if there were no need for deceit!"

"Now, little woman, that is a tabooed subject, and you must not sadden our last minutes with such thoughts. See, the time for parting has already come. Oh! my love, my love, how shall I bear to let you go!"

How white was the upturned, quivering face! What a passion of pain and love looked forth from the deep, dark eyes! Even he, that careless, selfish young fellow, was shaken with this hour's agony; and perhaps just now he thought more of her than of himself.

"You will be so lonely, poor heart!" he said, smoothing the beautiful hair with tender hands. "I shall have many friends to console me for my loss—no, not console, but help me

to hear it, and make the time of separation seem shorter; but you, poor little sweetheart, will be all alone!"

"Oh, don't!" she moaned. "I cannot bear it! Arthur, Arthur, I wish you were less dear to me! It would kill me now to lose you!"

"There is small fear of that. I can have no thought for other women, having known you."

"But—but sometimes death steps between those who love each other as we do."

"You shall not talk in such a way. You will send me on my journey with all sorts of forebodings. Come, darling, be brave! It is only for six months, and then we will be together always."

"You will tell her then?"

"Yes, yes, sweetheart. Now, kiss me good-bye—once more!"

Then came the sound of loving, whispered words, of stifled sighs, of quick-drawn, shuddering breaths. Then the echo of hastily-retreating steps, and a woman's voice that wailed good-bye. And when she could see him no longer Mary fell on her knees, praying passionately. "Oh, dear Heaven, bring him back to me!" not knowing then what a sorry boon she prayed for.

To Lily, Arthur said, pensively, that the thought of leaving the pleasant home circle, even for the delights of Cambridge life, was bitter to him. He asked her to remember him kindly when he was gone, and concluded with the words—

"When I return in June I hope to find you here; I shall then have something to say to you which I now lack courage to tell."

And how could the poor girl guess that he was referring to a hope he nourished that she would intercede for him with his mother when she learned of his engagement. Oh! what a tangled web he was weaving, only in the end to be caught and crushed in it. Poor, weak, vacillating Arthur!

After his departure the weeks and months passed more swiftly than Mary had dared to hope.

She had so many duties to occupy her time, and there were Arthur's letters to cheer her, so that the hours did not hang heavily upon her.

She missed Ronald's cheerful presence, but was glad that he had left the Manor, because he had openly sought her, wooing her in a plain and honest fashion, which touched her heart to pity for him.

"Why do you send me away?" he asked. "Is it because of Arthur?"

She flushed crimson, but answered gently—

"You have no right to ask me such a question!" but Ronald knew all too well he had guessed the truth.

"You have already answered me. Rest assured, Mary, your secret is safe with me; but, oh, Heaven! if only you had loved me I would have made you happy," and she wondered at the deep compassion in his eyes.

"I am going away to-morrow," he said, the next moment, in quite a matter-of-fact tone, "so will leave you my address. If there is ever anything great or small I can do for you you may command me," and perhaps because he could not say more, he turned away with no other leave-taking.

He went straight to his aunt.

"Aunt, I am leaving you to-morrow; I have already stayed an unconscionable time."

"You are always very welcome, Ronald; but for your own sake I should advise your departure for a little while. I have noticed you have paid far greater attention than is wise or well to Miss Graham."

"It is of her I come to speak; I may as well confess the truth. I come now from an interview with Miss Graham, in which she distinctly and emphatically refused to become my wife!"

"A very sensible decision, too, my dear Ronald. You must have been mad—"

"To suppose such a girl could love a fellow like me?" he said, willfully misconstruing her words. "Perhaps I was. Well, Aunt, I want

you, for my sake, to be a good friend to her. She is so young and lovely to be all alone in the world."

"I do not think I have ever treated Miss Graham harshly, but I will promise what you ask, because the girl has proved herself modest and unassuming," and she really meant to keep her word.

As for Ronald, when he had left the house behind, he broke into a fit of laughter, despite his heavy disappointment and grief.

"Oh! if she only knew the reason for Mary's conduct, what ructions there would be!" he said, aloud; and then grew grave, remembering all the weakness and moral cowardice of his cousin.

June came at last—June with its wealth of roses, its countless sweet scents and sounds, and Mary's heart was light as a feather.

In a little while all would be well. Arthur would be with her, and of late Mrs. Verral had been so considerate that Mary hoped she would be easily reconciled to her engagement.

Then there came a letter from Arthur, which made her tremble and grow cold, and yet which thrilled her through with a sudden sense of his great love.

"My queen," he wrote, "if you think, that after such a long absence, I shall be content to meet you only in the bosom of my family, you little know what manner of man you have chosen."

"I am not expected at home until the eighteenth, but I really leave here on the ninth, and am going down to Portdown, a little seacoast place in the west, where you must join me on the twelfth."

"Yes, Mary, I mean this in sober earnest. I know that until we are man and wife my mother will never receive you as her daughter; but, when once the deed is done, she will be powerless to help herself."

"And I am horribly afraid that while I wait and wait, trying to screw my courage up to the sticking point, some other fellow will step in and win you. I shall never feel safe, so I have determined to get a special license, and as soon as you can get down here we will be married."

"Oh, yes, I know the thousand and one objections you will raise, the frightened look in your dear eyes, and how your poor little heart will throb—not altogether with pain I hope. But, Mary, darling Mary! I know my own special weakness, as you can never know it; my own frailty of will, and horror of all unpleasant things; and if you would save me from myself, if you would have me in anything worthy, in anything good, you must come to me now."

"I ask it for my own sake—mine only. Write me only one word, but let it be 'yes.' I will forward all necessary funds, and you can easily get a holiday."

"You may tell the truth as to your destination, but must not say one word of me until I bid you. Oh! my little sweetheart, can you have the heart to refuse? Think of six long days spent together!"

And then followed a great deal more in the same strain.

Long did the girl battle with herself; but it is any wonder that in the end love conquered? And with many misgivings she wrote, consenting to his prayer.

Then she went to Mrs. Verral, and begged for leave of absence. The lady was in a most gracious mood.

"Certainly, Miss Graham, you may go. You have worked well, and have had no holiday since you came. Where do you intend going?"

"To Portdown, madam."

"You have friends there, I presume?"

"I have a friend there," and the pale face flushed so hotly it was well Mrs. Verral was intent upon some intricate lace work.

"I hope you will spend an agreeable week," and that terminated the interview.

How the poor girl passed the intervening days she could not tell. She was in a fever of apprehension, lest at the last all would be

discovered—lest some chance look or word would reveal the truth to Mrs. Verral, and bring calamity to Arthur and herself.

But at last the morning of the twelfth came, and before ten o'clock Mary was very far on her journey, speeding towards lover and happiness.

She was in a terribly excited state—her eyes burned, and her head throbbed and ached; her heart beat so madly that she thought her fellow passengers must hear, and guess on what errand she was bent.

And it was exquisite relief to her when they steamed into the little station, and she caught sight of Arthur, radiant and triumphant.

He hurried to meet her.

"My darling! my darling!" he whispered, as he took her little hand in his. "I was afraid that at the last you would fail me!"

Oh! better for her, far, far better had she indeed done so!

"I had promised you," she said, simply.

"And now, Arthur, where are you taking me?"

"To church, of course! Your luggage can be sent up to the Royal. Come, sweetheart, that will soon be wife. Oh! Mary, Mary! how shall I ever thank you—love you enough?"

"I have done nothing that calls for thanks. You are giving me everything, and I bring you nothing!"

"You bring your own dear self. What more can a man desire?"

"I am the beggar-maid, and you King Cophetua. Oh, Arthur! how I will strive to make you happy! Heaven helping me, you shall never have cause to regret this sacrifice for my poor sake!"

And with those words she entered the church with him, and saw like one in a dream the white-robed clergyman awaiting them—knew in the same vague way that Arthur had taken her by the hand, and led her to the altar.

Her heart beat so heavily she was like to faint, but when, kneeling together, she heard the solemn injunctions and exhortations, all the tumult and confusion fell from her like a garment; and all her soul rose in passionate prayer for help to be a perfect wife—true in thought and feeling to this man to whom she now pledged her truth.

Alas, alas! poor child! How often in the days that followed would she look on this hour as the most evil and bitter in all her cruel life!

But no shadow was on her happiness as she went into the sunshine with her handsome young bridegroom, who looked so ridiculously proud and glad that passers by turned to smile upon him, guessing all the truth.

They went at once to the Royal Hotel, where Arthur proudly introduced his bride to the obsequious landlord, and there followed six such happy days as are not often given mortals to know.

One morning, as they passed out of the hotel, a lady paused to look at them, and meeting the landlord in the entrance, said:—

"What a handsome young couple, Mr. Cullam! Are they brother and sister?"

"Oh, no, my lady!" answered Cullam, bowing profoundly. "They are bride and bridegroom. The gentleman is Mr. Arthur Verral, and the marriage was quite a romantic one."

But the Countess Loria's interest was already exhausted, and languidly thanking Mr. Cullam for his information, she went on to her own apartments, thinking that Mary's face looked very familiar, and wondering where she had seen it.

On the morning of the eighteenth Mary returned to the Manor alone, Arthur following in the evening.

To her bitter disappointment he utterly refused to acknowledge their marriage, because, "for a little while, it was politic to keep the secret inviolate!"

CHAPTER V.

Then followed a bitter time for Mary—a time of cruel suspense and fear—a gradual awakening to the weakness of her husband's

nature. She never doubted his love, for indeed his passion for her was intense and lasting; but slowly, slowly it was borne upon her that in all things she must be the guide and director.

She was so weary of an unequal battle with the world that she longed to rest her weakness upon another's strength; and so she found she had leaned upon a reed. But she loved him still, in spite of all, with a love that had something pitifully maternal in it, and she bore with all his complainings about the untowardness of his fate with a patience that was almost sublime.

Think of that poor girl's life, then—the least respected in the household, toiling hard, suffering many an indignity from servants as well as mistress, she who should have been the loved and honoured wife and daughter; seeing her husband flouting it with the best, hearing his name coupled with that of Miss Dornon, knowing that when she sat lonely and sad in the solitary schoolroom he was leaning over Lily's chair, singing to her playing, looking into her pretty eyes with admiration in his own. Oh! it was hard, it was hard!

"He, mixing with his proper sphere
She finds the baseness of her lot;
Half jealous of she knows not what,
And envying all who meet him there."

In July Mrs. Verral announced her intention of "doing the Rhine" in company with the Dornons and some other friends, and of course Arthur was to accompany them. His mother hoped in this trip to bring matters to a climax with Lily and her son, and it was Mary's anguish to know this.

"Arthur," she said, when they met the night before his departure, "how long is this to go on? My life is a misery to me!"

"Oh, now Mary, it isn't like you to complain. You must be patient, don't you see! I am altogether yours, and nothing can set aside the fact that you are my wife. I thank Heaven for that!"

"But, Arthur, think of the misery of it all! Is it not cruel that I, your wife, must steal out to meet you as though it were a sin to do so?—that I must be a living lie! a daily cheat? Oh, Arthur, Oh, my husband! let us brave the worst! It cannot be very hard while we have each other."

"How stupidly you talk," he retorted, so angrily that she shrank back in dismay. "We could not live on bread and water; we might even think ourselves lucky to get that sumptuous diet. I must take my own time to tell the matter, and if you make any premature disclosure I warn you it will be worse for us."

"I shall not betray you," she said, so coldly, that he was startled, "and I think I shall never press you upon this subject again."

Then she turned as if to go, but he held her fast.

"Mary, sweetheart, wife; you shall not leave me in anger. My darling, just in this one thing you must let me use my own discretion. Surely I know my mother best!"

"Yes, I grant that; but you promised when your college career was ended this deceit should end too. You have not kept your word. Arthur, Arthur!" beginning to tremble, "if ever you loved me, if indeed I am dear to you, give me my rightful place in the world. I am not afraid of poverty. I will work unceasingly for you; but—"

"But, my dear girl, you don't understand all you are promising, all you are urging upon me. It would be death to all my prospects to proclaim the truth just now."

"It is death to our happiness to hold your peace; it is cruel and unmanly to encourage any hope Miss Dornon may have."

"Upon my soul, Mary, you are jealous!" he said, airily. "What a little goose you are! If I had not loved you first and best, should I have made you my wife? Little woman, you are fractious to-night."

She made no answer, being far too wounded

for speech to be easy; only the look she turned upon him lingered with him many a day.

"Poor little girl! poor little girl!" he said, soothingly, and kissed the beautiful mouth, which, for the first time since he confessed his love, did not respond to his caress. "It is hard for you, but it won't be for long; and as you love me, Mary, you will remember my commands. I shall write to you very often, and when I come back we will discuss the best way of bringing about our disclosure. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Then kiss me, and be good. It is not like you to worry a fellow."

"I will never trouble you again," proudly. "You shall choose your own time; but, oh! I think if I had a father or brother to defend my rights you would treat me less cavalierly."

"Mary, you don't know what you are saying. You imply I am cruel and false to you, when, as Heaven is my witness, I love you with all my soul. Don't you believe that, wife of mine!"

"Oh, yes, I believe you love me."

"Well, feeling assured of that, you surely might trust me to act honestly towards you; and, for Heaven's sake, let us part friends. Who knows whether we may meet again? Before the three months have gone one of us may be dead."

With swift compunction she turned, threw her arms about his neck, caught him close to her wounded heart, kissing him wildly, whilst the tears flowed fast down her cheeks.

"Arthur! Arthur! do not speak of death. I was hard to you, harder than I should have been; but I love you, oh! dear husband, I love you! and I will say no harsh word to spoil your coming enjoyment."

"It will not be enjoyment without you."

And so with kisses and tender words they parted; he to fill those three months with every conceivable pleasure; she to spend the dreary, unsatisfactory days in weary labour, to eat out her heart with fruitless longings for the sound of his voice and the touch of his hand.

In September Mrs. Verral returned to the Manor, irritable and exacting, for Arthur had not proved amenable; and Lily was not so easily pacified as once she was.

She had gone home to her own people, and after two days spent with his family, Arthur started for Scotland, where he intended having good sport.

So it was, from time to time only, that Mary saw her husband; and then their interviews were brief and unsatisfactory.

He was almost always from home, fearing, in his cowardly soul, that any prolonged sojourn there might rouse Mrs. Verral's suspicions.

Christmas again drew near, and the wretched young wife thought miserably of the past—that previous Christmas Day when she had thought herself blessed beyond her deserts.

Mrs. Verral had issued numerous invitations, and Mary's services were in great requisition, Mrs. Verral herself being a very indifferent correspondent.

"Here is one I wish you to answer without delay," she said, handing Mary a daintily-perfumed note. "You will say that I shall be most happy to receive Mrs. Dalmaine's friend. But if you read it you will see better what you have to do."

So Mary took the note and read:—

"My Dear Friend,—I should be most happy to accept your invite, but I have a friend staying with me whom I could not possibly neglect, because she has great influence abroad, and I am anxious she should use it in behalf of my poor boy. She is very beautiful and talented, confesses to forty years, although I think she is nearer fifty. If you could accommodate her without any inconvenience to yourself I should be glad, as, from experience, I know how pleasant life is at the Manor. I am afraid you will think I am trying to impose on your good nature, but really,

I should like you to meet my friend. She is the rich widow of Count Loria (an old Italian nobleman), and is very fascinating. Hoping for an early reply,—I remain, dear friend, yours affectionately,

"LOUISE DALMAINE."

Now, Mrs. Verral worshipped a title, and Mary knew very well what sort of answer she was expected to send, and wrote accordingly, and then she began to wonder what this Christmas would bring her.

Ronald was not coming. She would miss his friendly face and little kindly attentions. Arthur had sent a very short and unsatisfactory letter, saying he hoped to be at the Manor on Christmas Eve, and with that she was forced to be content.

In the three days preceding Christmas Day Mary was too busy to have time for much thought; and she was glad it should be so, for she wished to forget, as far as possible, her most unhappy lot.

On the morning of the twenty-third, Mrs. Dalmaine and the Countess arrived, but Mary did not see either lady; only she heard that the latter lady was still very beautiful, and so haughty that the maids were afraid of her.

In the evening Arthur arrived, and, as it was not cruel, his young wife dare not run to meet him; that her only glimpse of him should be from the schoolroom window as he passed into the house, laughing gaily with his companions!

The poor girl flung out her arms. "Oh, Heaven! help me! I cannot bear it!" she moaned, and sank shuddering to the ground.

She did not meet him that evening; in fact, he was far too wise to make any attempt to see her, with the servants scudding to and fro, up and down the stairs and galleries.

His mother had commissioned him to take the stranger in to dinner, and he found himself attached to a lady of uncertain age, but still very handsome and magnificently dressed, although she was too liberal in the display of her white neck and arms.

"Your face is familiar to me!" she said, looking at the young man with a dazzling smile. "Have we not met before?"

He hastened to assure her to the contrary.

"Had I been so fortunate as to meet you at any time," he said, gallantly, "I could not have forgotten such grace and beauty!"

"Ah, naughty boy, you have already learned how to flatter!" she exclaimed, tapping him lightly on the arm with her fan; "but I am confident, quite confident, that we are not altogether strangers!"

Despite her foreign name and appearance, she spoke without the slightest accent, and had none of those little gestures peculiar to foreign women; and Arthur found himself wondering who and what she was. She had a large experience of men and their ways, a knowledge of most civilised countries, and proved herself such an amusing partner that Arthur almost forgot his pale young wife sitting in dreary solitude, with no companions but her own sad thoughts. But, as he retired to his room that night, a feeling of shame and compassion came over him.

"Poor darling, she deserves a better fellow!" he thought. "I am such a weak, vacillating wretch; but when all these folks are gone I will try to pluck up courage to confess my sins to the matter. And, meanwhile, I must see Mary in the morning."

But the morning gave him no chance, and the afternoon wore away in nonsense and badinage until, indeed, the dusk was falling. Then, as he was crossing the hall, he came full tilt upon Mary.

"My dear," he said, hurriedly, but she drew back.

"Don't speak to me now," she whispered, "there are others near;" and then she fled upstairs, her heart full of sick scorn for this man she called husband—but still she loved him.

In her own room she crouched, praying for help and strength, crying in her sad heart

that the world was against her, and that death only could release her from misery and humiliation. And breaking in upon her anguished prayers and bitter pains came a maid's voice, requesting her presence in the drawing-room. There was no lady present who felt herself equal to accompanying the singers, Lily Dornton being absent. So the governess rose, and smoothing her hair, straightening the crumpled folds of her dress, went downstairs. Only one woman in that room noticed her, and that was the Countess Loria. As Mary entered her face flushed, her black eyes gleamed with sudden recollection, but she was too much a woman of the world to speak then.

She waited until a young lady who was warbling an Italian bravura in a most exciting style finished before she turned to her hostess and begged her to walk in the conservatories with her, pleading as her excuse that the room was hot. Mrs. Verral, flattered by such marked partiality, agreed only too readily; and together the two strolled into the beautiful houses. Then, after duly admiring the plants and flowers, the Countess turned to her companion.

"Dear Mrs. Verral, what a singularly lovely girl your governess is! I wonder you are not afraid to have her here, where such a susceptible young fellow as your son is may meet her daily!"

"Arthur is too proud ever to make a *misalliance*."

The Countess smiled peculiarly, but contented herself with asking:—

"What is the lady's name?"

"Miss Gresham—Mary Gresham."

"The name has a familiar sound to me. Do not consider me impertinent, but I should very much like to know from what place she came, and who recommended her?"

Mrs. Verral would be glad to give her guest any information in her power. She had engaged Miss Gresham solely on the recommendation of her governess, Miss Samborne, who had told her that everything connected with her birth was a profound mystery."

The Countess's dark eyes flashed triumphantly.

"Then, for aught madam knew, she was a foundling, a waif. Ah! surely madam did not exercise her usual discretion when she engaged Miss Gresham as governess to her little innocent children. What was 'bred in the bone' would come out in the flesh, and doubtless Miss Gresham was not so good as she ought to be."

"What did the Countess mean?" questioned Mrs. Verral, in an alarmed way. "The young lady in question had always given her satisfaction."

"I am sorry I spoke," said the other, "as your governess seems to be such a favourite with you. But for your own sake you should know the truth. Where was Miss Gresham from June the twelfth until the eighteenth?"

"At Portdown, a little place on the west coast."

"Then it would be difficult for her to prove an *adulteress*. I was staying at the Royal then, and Miss Gresham was there too in the character of bride, your son passing as bridegroom."

"What?" cried Mrs. Verral, forgetful of all forms of etiquette. "My dear Countess, you must be mistaken. Arthur has never seemed so much as to notice her, which I thought wonderful, as he is susceptible to beauty, and Mary Gresham is undeniably a lovely girl."

"I am quite sure I am not mistaken. In fact, I was so much struck with the appearance of the young people that I questioned the landlord concerning them. He told me they were bride and bridegroom—Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Verral."

"Arthur would never be so mad!" cried his mother. "He knows what such a *misalliance* would mean for him."

"That being the case, what conclusions can you draw?"

"Oh, don't!" pleaded Mrs. Verral, weakly. "She is so young, and he is my son. I would be glad to think you are mistaken. But if not, why, of course, she must go. Come back with me, and I will sift the matter to the bottom."

"What, in front of them all?" questioned the Countess, somewhat staggered by the other's energetic measures.

"Why not?" retorted Mrs. Verral. "If what you say is true that girl leaves here to-night. My roof shall not shelter her another hour."

So together they went back to the brilliant drawing-room, where Mary was playing some sweet, sad music, conscious all the while that Arthur was carrying on a very brisk flirtation with a young miss; and, pausing in the centre of the room, Mrs. Verral said, sternly, "Miss Gresham!"

Something in her tone struck a chill to the poor girl's heart. She rose, trembling in every limb, and, with one hand resting on the piano, turned her pale and frightened face upon her employer, conscious—oh! so cruelly conscious—of the wondering faces and pitiless eyes bent upon her.

"I want you to tell me where you spent your holiday last June?"

Like one in a dream she saw the wonder deepen in those watchful faces. She saw Arthur start and tremble, and knew in that moment that the worst had come.

"I stayed at Portdown, Mrs. Verral."

Was that her own voice speaking? How far away it sounded! What a terrible mist was before her eyes!

"And may I ask who was your companion?"

She shot one swift, entreating glance at Arthur, but he would not meet her eyes. He bent his own persistently upon the ground.

"Madam, I will tell you another time—not here or now."

"I request you to tell me the whole truth without delay. I have learned from reliable sources that you posed at Portdown as my son's wife! Is that true?"

"Mother," cried Arthur, "you have no right to insult Miss Gresham!"

"Be quiet, Arthur. I am anxious only to know the truth, to vindicate this young person, if vindication is possible. Kindly tell me, Miss Gresham, if Mr. Verral was your companion?"

She glanced once again appealingly towards him, but he was dumb. Then, in her desperation, she said:—

"It is quite true."

"Then I must beg of you to leave the house at once!"

"Stay, madam, you do not understand! I am not the vile creature you would willingly believe me, but the lawful wife of Mr. Arthur Verral!"

CHAPTER VI.

Had a bomb fallen in the midst of that select company it could not have been more completely startled. As for Arthur, he stood guilty and afraid, knowing well what would be the cost of his love. For the moment he almost hated Mary.

"If this is true, you are no longer a son of mine!" cried Mrs. Verral, fiercely. "Take your nameless wife, and go! If it is false, deny it now—to-morrow will be too late!"

His face was white and drawn, his lips so stiff, that, although he moistened them, he could frame no word. The terrible temptation upon him then held him silent, and scarcely conscious of what was passing around him. Only he knew that Mary crossed the room, and he heard her say, in a voice that sounded very far away,

"Arthur you will not shame me before these people? Tell them I am your lawful, loving wife! Oh! why are you silent? Why do you allow me for one moment to rest under this stigma?"

"Speak Arthur," said Mrs. Verral, sternly.

"Is this woman's story true?"

And then—oh! the shame and horror of it—he lifted his head; and, shaking off the gentle hand that held him, muttered,

"It is false. I would have spared her if I could."

Then rose such a clamour of voices that one might well be deafened, voices that spoke scornfully of and to that poor child standing alone and friendless in the centre of the room, wholly incapable of motion, her chin dropped on her breast, her eyes wide with horror, and her arms hung slackly by her sides—such a sad picture, that one young girl broke into passionate sobs of pity.

Mrs. Verral advanced.

"Go!" she said. "You shall not remain under this roof another hour, you shameless, abandoned woman!"

But Mary did not stir; she did not even seem to hear, and the other grasping her by the arm shook her violently.

"What is it?" she gasped, in a hoarse whisper. "Oh, yes! I know now; you want me to go. I—I am going. Arthur—where is he?" and her eyes wandered vacantly round the room until they rested on that guilty, shrinking figure.

Then she laughed—oh, such a terrible laugh—that those who heard shuddered, and thought, affrightedly, the girl was stricken with madness.

"Arthur—I have called you husband—I have loved you well and truly—and—you—have—given me shame—as my reward." (How slowly and painfully her words came.) "You are—sending me—out into a cruel world—bereft of name and honour!—Heaven help me! I see you—now as you are—and not for worlds—would I live with you—again, or call you husband!"

She staggered blindly towards the door, but Arthur intercepted her.

"I have wronged you," he said in a strange, hardly intelligible voice, "but I will not see you want. Say good-bye to me, Mary? Oh, Heaven!" and then he dropped into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, broke into a hoarse and terrible sob.

She looked on him a moment, with loathing and pity struggling for supremacy in her breast, her eyes; then, without a word, turned from him, and some one in mercy opened the door.

A little later they heard the hall-door slam, and knew that she had gone out into the bitter night, homeless, friendless, in all probability penniless.

Arthur started to his feet, his face pallid as death, his eyes bloodshot, and rushing out called her name softly at first, then louder, louder still, but there came no answer to his cries; and slinking back to the house like a beaten cur, he fell prone upon the steps in a swoon.

This Christmas Eve was as unlike the typical Christmas as it was possible to be. The wind shrieked and howled over the desolate fens, driving all before it; bending and breaking the trees so sparsely scattered over the district: the rain fell in torrents, swelling every tiny ditch and dyke into quite noble proportions.

It was a wild and eerie scene, a wild and eerie night; and the distant clang of the Christmas bells sounded uncanny in the thick, unwholesome air.

There was with one exception, no sign of life, and that exception—oh! the shame and pity of it!—was a young and a delicate girl. Mad with her misery, poor Mary made her way to the distant station. Did no thought of that last walk there come to intensify her anguish then? How full of hope she had been! How confident of Arthur's love and faith! And now she was thrown upon the world, her reputation gone, a wife and no wife; for never for a moment did she dream of proving her marriage.

"She loathed from the trodden heart

That thing which she had found man's love to be."

Arriving at the station she counted her little

store of money. She had twelve shillings in all.

She longed to put as great a distance between Childesthorpe and herself as possible, but she dared not spend more than five shillings on her ticket, and quite at random pitched upon a very small town rejoicing in the name of Bodkin-sur-Clay.

Throughout the journey she scarcely felt her anguish. She could scarcely think; brain and heart alike were numb.

"To-morrow," she whispered to herself; "to-morrow I shall realise all."

Arrived at the miserable little station, she inquired the way to the town.

"It's straight ahead, miss, but it's a good three miles off, and there's only one house along the road. It isn't a nice walk at night for a girl."

"I must press on," she said, heavily; and once more she was out in the wind and rain, fighting with the unkind elements—wet to the skin, frightened by her unusual surroundings, but always resolute to place miles between herself and Arthur.

On and on; and oh! how weary she was! She felt it impossible to reach the town, but "perhaps," she thought, "the people at that half-way house would give her shelter for the night." It was in sight now—a black mass against a blacker sky.

Tossed and buffeted to and fro, breathless with her exertions, faint with grief and fasting she held on her way, each step growing feebler than the last, whilst a deathlike faintness stole over brain and body alike.

"I never shall do it!" she gasped, and a great sob rose to her lips. "There are no lights visible, and if the house is empty I can go no farther. I must lie down and die."

The house towards which she bent her steps stood all alone on the edge of the wood—a gaunt, ancient building, which offered no attraction to any passer-by. The windows were all shuttered and barred, and a deathly stillness (added to the general gloom), made it appear uncanny, yet the poor wanderer regarded it as a haven of rest!

In one of the many large rooms, bending over a huge fire—the only cheerful thing there—sat a man, looking with sombre, brooding eyes into the glowing embers.

"Pain and shame and bitterness of spirit, year in and year out," he muttered. "Oh, Heaven! when will it all end?"

The firelight flickered over his face, and showed it worn and old beyond his years; for despite the whitening hair and sunken (though still bright) eyes he could not have been much more than forty.

"I am weary of it all," he said, again breaking the heavy silence, "weary of this unrest and desolation, the dreadful memories of a bitter past," and he groaned as his head sank lower, lower yet, until his chin rested on his breast.

It was then that a faint knock was heard at the front door, scarcely discernible amid the howling wind and driving rain.

He started erect. Visitors were very rare at Lone Croft, and certainly he expected none, being so long dead to the world.

"I must have been mistaken," he said; but even as he spoke he heard that faint tapping again, and then an old woman entered hurriedly, looking very scared and white.

"Oh, sir, they've come at last, as I said they would! You ain't no right to live in such a lone house, with none but me to see after you. For mercy's sake, don't open the door. We shall be killed where we stand. Oh, no, sir! Oh, no, Mr. Cassilis!" as he caught up a lamp, "for pity's sake don't go for to put yourself and me in such danger."

"Stand back, Hannah!" he said, sternly, and putting her aside strode into the gloomy hall; and even whilst he busied himself with bolts and bars he heard a sweet voice outside, praying him, for Heaven's sake, to give a wretched woman shelter. Then it died out in a low wail; and when at last the door was opened, he saw a woman's figure prone upon

the steps, her arms outstretched, her face hidden in the waves of long, dark hair. He started back with a hoarse cry, "Oh, Heaven! not you," he said. "Have you come back to torture me after all these years?"

The horror and loathing on his face, the love which struggled with the scorn in his eyes, made him terrible to her.

Stooping, he turned the woman's face towards him, and a sigh of relief rose to his lips as the lamp-light flickered across the pale, small features, and proud, sweet mouth.

"Heaven be thanked!" he said. Then calling to Hannah he lifted the girl to his strong, sinewy arms, and prepared to carry her in.

"Who is she? Are you sure she is alone?" questioned the woman.

"Stand out of my way, and let me get her comfortably settled on the couch. Now, some brandy; she is wet through!"

Hannah obeyed in silence, a little awed by her master's manner; but she noticed that although the stranger's clothes were inexpensive they were neatly ordered, and that she had the look of a lady.

Mr. Cassilis seemed to notice nothing, only continued his kindly offices with a gentleness one could scarcely believe in him, and at last he was rewarded by seeing the heavy, white lids lift, the grey eyes open upon his face, in perplexed and troubled scrutiny.

"Drink this," he said, holding a glass of hot brandy and water to the pale lips, and he would take no denial; only stood watching her with frowning brow, and critical sombre eyes.

"What is your name?" he asked, as he relieved her of the glass.

"Mary Verral."

"Where do you come from? What are your friends about to allow you to roam over the country in this fashion?"

"I have no friends, and I am seeking employment."

He regarded her intently, then said:

"You are too fatigued to go further to-night. Hannah, take Miss Verral to your room, and see that her clothes are dried. To-morrow you shall tell me your story; to-night you had better rest."

"Do you mean I may stay here to-night? Oh! how I shall thank you! Tell me your name, that I may remember it in my prayers," and the beautiful grey eyes were full of grateful tears; the sweet pale face was flushed and agitated.

"I am Philip Cassilis, and I want no thanks. Let Hannah bring you some supper."

"I could not eat, thank you."

"Very well, then, I insist you shall go to bed at once. Good-night."

He stood watching her whilst she went upstairs with weary, lagging steps, then, returning to his desolate fireside, stretched out his arms with a heavy groan.

"It is the same all the world over," he said. "Want, misery, and sin rule us with a high hand. Even that child has not escaped misfortune."

When Mary woke the next morning (for, despite her misery, she had been so weary as to fall asleep as soon as her head touched the pillows), she heard the distant chiming of the town bells, and for a moment wondered where she was. Then, as recollection came to her, fraught with bitter anguish and shame, she covered down amongst her pillows, praying Heaven in its mercy to take her home.

But she was not allowed much time for reflection.

Presently Hannah entered with a small tray of good things; but although Mary drank eagerly of the coffee she utterly refused to eat anything.

"My throat is so sore," she said, "and my limbs ache as though I had been beaten; but perhaps I shall feel better when I am up and dressed."

"Very likely. You've took cold, of course, and there ain't no wonder, neither. I've dried and brushed your clothes, and made 'em as decent as I can, but they're just about spoiled. Can you find your way downstairs, 'cause when you are dressed the master wants to see you."

"Oh, yes, thank you!" and wearily, painfully, the poor girl began her toilet.

When she went downstairs she found Mr. Cassilis waiting her. Bowing formally, he drew a chair towards the fire and made her sit down.

"You look ill," he said, in an abrupt but not unkindly way. "If you feel the task too hard to tell me your story wait until to-morrow."

"Oh! no, no; I cannot trespass so greatly upon your kindness."

"No creature was ever turned from my doors on Christmas Day," coldly, "and I am old enough to be your father. You need not fear that your stay in my house will be misconstrued. They call me here," with a bitter smile, "Simon, 'Diogenes,' 'Miser,' and a host of other flattering names; but much as I hate the world, cruelly as it has treated me, I can not yet quite without a heart or bowels of compassion."

"Oh! I feel that; and I feel, too, that this harsh manner (forgive me), is worn as a disguise, and I will tell you all from beginning to end;" and then she began her sad and bitter story, Mr. Cassilis listening with darkening face and flashing eyes; and when she had made an end to the sorry narrative, he said:

"Poor child! poor child! I would not insult you by begging you to swear your tale is true, but I will stand by you and see you righted."

But she broke out—

"You will not send me back to him! He is my husband, but he has forfeited all claim to my love and duty. I would die rather than go back to him."

"You shall not go back, but you shall be righted. Child, I, too, have suffered; aye, as bitterly even, if not more so, than you. You shall stay with me until you have recruited your strength and found employment; and should that villain attempt to molest you I swear he shall rue it until the day of his death."

She caught his hand and kissed it, and as she did so the Christmas bells rang out wildly, joyously. A bitter sneer disfigured the man's face, a wild look leapt into his eyes.

"Listen to them," he said, quickly, "they are heralds of joy to others. We should do well, you and I—you so young and fair, I so old and worn—to curse our fate and die."

The girl started to her feet, such a host of terrible memories thronged her brain, such mad anguish possessed her heart, remembering that bygone Christmas only a year ago—one little year ago! Oh! love hope, joy of other days—where were they now? Withered and dead, even as the flowers of last summer, and in the ways she used to walk with Arthur she might never be seen again.

False to love, false to honour, and every manly instinct, how low had her idol fallen! She could remember him now only with utmost loathing and contempt. Her life was over and done with.

Oh, Heaven! grant that death would come to ease her terrible burden.

With a low, wild cry she caught at her throat, as though she were suffocating.

"A happy Christmas!" she cried, laughing shrilly. "A happy Christmas to you all!" and fell prone to the ground. Before night she was in a raging fever.

The sequel to this highly-interesting and seasonable Novelette will appear next week, when will be made plain Mr. Cassilis' interest in Mary Verral, and the punishment that followed on Arthur's betrayal of her.

Gleanings

ONE frown a day when she's in her 'teens will wrinkle a girl's forehead like a crone by the time she's twenty.

TRY to make yourself as agreeable to your brother as if he were some other girl's brother. It will pay you to win his boyish confidence.

THERE are nineteen Parliaments in the British Empire—ten in British North America, seven in Australasia, and two in South Africa.

THE New Zealand Government has decided that swimming and life-saving shall be taught in all its schools. The Life Saving Society's method having been adopted, 2,000 handbooks and charts have been sent by order of the Government for the use of schoolmasters.

A New Zealand chemist claims to have discovered a process which will enable eggs from Australasia to be landed fresh and fit for consumption in the English market. The chemist with his process is coming to England shortly. He asserts that, if necessary, he would have no difficulty in preserving eggs for a period of three years.

X-RAYS AS A DETECTIVE.—A striking illustration of the value of X-rays has been supplied by the Post Office at Buenos Ayres in the shape of detective work. The Government officials, not being empowered legally to open registered letters, jewellers found that smuggling in registered letters from Europe was a very safe plan. The authorities, having resolved to investigate the evil without violating the laws, the X-rays were applied to registered letters, and promptly revealed watches, chains, rings, and other valuables in astonishing quantity. Such evidence was sufficient for a court order to open the packages, and more than 20,000dols. worth of property was confiscated in a single week.

WET AND DRY MOON.—No weather belief is more absurd than that of a "wet moon" and a "dry moon." There is no connection between the position of the moon's horns and the rainfall unless the same weather recurs at the same time each year, for, as Mr. A. K. Bartlett has lately taken the trouble to explain, the crescent moon always appears "upon its back" in spring near the vernal equinox, and "upon its end" in autumn, near the autumnal equinox. The change of direction in which the horns are turned depends upon the difference in declination of the sun and moon. If the moon be further north than the sun soon after the new, the sunlight strikes under her, and she appears with her horns upturned, but if she be further south the light reaches around her disc to the northward, and her horns appear nearly vertical. The line joining the two horns is always at right angles to a line joining the sun and the moon.

"HUMAN VANITY TO HUMAN MISERY."—One of the large hospitals at Rio de Janeiro bears on its front the above inscription in letters of gold. And the following is the interpretation thereof. The Emperor Dom Pedro of Brazil, who was the friend of the poor and the suffering, wished to erect a hospital for the benefit of the indigent invalids in the capital of his Empire. Hence the public were invited to subscribe to such an institution. But there was hardly any response. Then the Emperor made it known that the title of "baron" was to be conferred on every subscriber of 100,000 milreis, and that of "count" on every subscriber of 250,000 milreis. And lo! and behold, a stream of money began to pour into the coffers of the building fund. The misery of the poor had not touched the wealthy; but the appeal to their vanity had not been in vain. The great day of the opening of the hospital came. An enormous crowd was gathered together. Everybody was gazing up to the gable of the new building which was to be "unveiled." When the cover was withdrawn the newly-made "aristocracy" read their Emperor's estimation of themselves in the inscription, "Human Vanity to Human Misery."

LET a man imagine he is having his own way and a woman can do anything with him; let a woman but suspect she is having her own way and a man can do nothing with her.

WHAT a pity that most of our most brilliant and original ideas did not present themselves to us first.

TEA was first brought to Europe by the Dutch East India Company in 1610. It was not brought to England until 1666. Coffee had been known in Europe previously, but it was only in the latter part of the seventeenth century that it came into use in England.

THE island of Java, which is only 672 miles long and 135 miles wide, and located only three degrees off the Equator, supplies practically all the cinchona bark from which the world's supply of quinine is made. There are about 25,000 acres of this island used in growing cinchona.

HIS RULING PASSION.—Tales of the prison-house generally come to us from chaplains, and make for edification. The following little episode lately happened at the grimmest gaol in the London district. In the prison infirmary was a man who had served many successive terms for theft, and was now wasted away and at the point of death from consumption. How he lingered on was a puzzle to the doctor who, with his stethoscope, leant over him for a last time. As he did so, he saw a tremulous shadow of a hand raised to his waistcoat pocket, and his watch abstracted and put under the dying man's pillow. It was his last effort; a smile of triumph passed over his face, and he was dead.

"HOLD up a ring and let them jump for it." The cynical phrase was tested by a popular American preacher—as is stated in an American Methodist journal. The preacher had lost one wife and wanted another. None of the circumlocutory cumbrous matrimonial advertisement for him. He simply rose in the pulpit and said, "I am a candidate for matrimony, and if any woman in this congregation would care to take me, let her rise." She rose. Two of her. The minister, with a critical speaker's eye, timed the risings and called on the first. Then he invited the rest of the congregation to a hymn.

A HISTORIC CEDAR.—There are in the Garden references to some remarkable trees. One is the famous cedar at Biel, N.B., which was taken in a flowerpot from London by Lord Belhaven, it is thought on the last occasion he was there, when he opposed the consummation of the union between England and Scotland—in 1707. In due time it became an object of interest to gardeners and forsters, and we first hear of it in "Niol's Planter's Guide" (1812), where its dimensions are given as 40ft. high and 10ft. 4in. girth breast high. In 1819 its girth had increased to 11ft. 2in. In 1831, when the Berwickshire Nature Club visited Biel, it was again measured, its height then being 82ft., and its girth, at 5ft. from the ground, 19ft. Since then it has made 16in., and is now 20ft. 4in. in circumference at 5ft. from the ground. Its age must be almost 200 years, and its growth during that period is very remarkable.

THE way we treat burglars to-day is very humane compared with our former treatment of the "aristocrat of crime." At one time even shop-lifting to the value of 5s. was punishable by death; but this is not so remarkable as the fact that under the Plantagenets also, when punishments were at their mildest, burglars were hanged. A man who forged a title-deed was only led through the city to the pillory, mounted on a horse with his head turned towards the tail; a man who sold bad meat merely suffered the disgrace of walking bareheaded, in a white shirt, along the Chepe, carrying a wax taper. No doubt, though, it was quite reasonable to take drastic measures with the burglar when the citizen kept all his worldly wealth under his roof, and was therefore reduced to beggary by one successful effort of the housebreaker.

MANX LAW.—Manx servants who refuse to complete the period of service for which they are engaged are liable to curious punishment. In a case before the magistrate at Peel recently William Corlett, a farm labourer, was charged with refusing to carry out his engagement. It was stated that the penalty provided by a statute of 1665 is that the servant is to be kept in prison and allowed one cake and a cup of water per day until he returns to service. Corlett was spared this punishment, as the magistrate was satisfied that he had not engaged to serve a stated period.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD "TOAST," in drinking a health, is interesting. The drinks most in use in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were sack, canary, claret, sherry, and others, to which it was customary to add honey, sugar, ginger, cinnamon, and other ingredients; also a piece of toast, which floated on top of the liquor, and was supposed to give it an additional flavour. Later on, in the eighteenth century, Dr. Johnson relates:—"A certain beau, being at Bath, pledged a noted beauty in a glass of water taken from her bath; whereupon another roysterer cried out he would have nothing to do with the liquor—but would have the toast—that is, the lady herself." From this incident, it is said, arose the habit of giving a lady's name to preface, or flavour, the drinking of wine. Hence a popular lady whose health was often drunk became "a toast," or "a great toast." Later the word has come to mean any sentiment which prefaces a drink.

AUTOMATIC RESTAURANT.—The coin-in-the-slot principle has been utilised in what is known as the "automatic restaurant," an establishment where, without the assistance of an attendant, all kinds of light refreshments either in the liquid or solid form can be purchased. The machinery is of Continental design, and as originally made was suited to the ten-centime nickel pieces which serve the purpose of pennies. Many alterations were needed before the mechanism could be adjusted for the reception of our more cumbrous bronze coinage; but at last these difficulties have been surmounted, and the automatic restaurant has found an abiding-place in London. A commendable feature about the apparatus is that the solid—appetising sandwiches, etc.—can be seen through glass before the coin is advanced for their purchase.

THE FEATURES.—"Featural Surgery," as it is called, is no new thing really, for so far back as A.D. 1218, or thereabout, we learn that a knight, by name Ulrich von Lichtenstein, had an operation performed on his under lip to make it thinner, because the lady to whom he was attached did not approve of it as given to him by Nature. To-day there is in New York, with branches in four other principal cities of the United States, a celebrated Dermatological Institute, which was established in 1870. Here fashionable Americans, men, as well as women and girls, it is said, go to be beautified. If, for instance, the nose has a deep dent or an ugly hump at its bridge, it will be so manipulated that a handsome bridge will take its place; if it has a bulbous growth where its dainty "tip" should be, or is flat and too wide-boasted, or irregular in any direction, it makes no matter, it can be altered by means of "featural surgery." A mouth that is too large can with ease be made smaller; and a dimple given to cheek or chin, to add to its fascination. Eyes can be made straight, ears that "stick out," or are too prominent, can be laid close to the head in one operation; in short, one has only to "ask and to have" anything one desires for oneself in the matter of personal beauty at this wonderful Dermatological Institute. The work so successfully carried on in America for many years past is now being done in London at the Derma-Featural Co., 69, New Bond Street, W. The chief operator can be consulted any day, or if it is not convenient to call in the first place, a little pamphlet explaining the system more fully will be sent post free on application.

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Neil Ainslie, néé Marsh, determines to try and earn her own living, and makes the acquaintance of Bruce Carew, an artist at the top of his profession, who offers her employment. She is subsequently adopted into Mrs. Ainslie's family. Neil's sister, Queenie, has become secretly betrothed to Austin Brooks, but on learning that she is a St. Clune and with the possibility of becoming Lady Combermere, poor Austin is neglected; but he is so blindly in love that he does not see the change in her.

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Truth to say, there was nothing soft or appealing about Mrs. Marks. She was one of those women who always seem capable of looking out for their own interests, and who—to do them justice—usually do so.

Now all was changed. Mr. Ashwin's account had alarmed Kenneth, but even that had not prepared him for the reality. His handsome, self-contained, dignified mother transformed into a nervous, trembling woman who shuddered hysterically at every sound, and actually clung to him for protection, begging him not to leave her!

It was so incredible Kenneth could hardly realise it.

And then, when he and Miss Taylor at last persuaded her to confide to them the cause of her terrors, her answer was the most marvellous thing of all. They asked her from what they were to protect her, and she said, "My husband's ghost!"

Kenneth looked at Miss Taylor, but her eyes were fixed steadily on the ground. She would not meet his gaze, and her silence seemed to say she would rather he asked her no questions till they were alone. The first thought which seized poor Lord Combermere was that his mother was mad. The second that she had been dabbling in the delights of table-rapping and spiritualistic seances, until she grew bewildered. But neither of these explanations were probable.

Mrs. Marks was one of those selfish, complacent women who are the last people in the world to excite themselves into madness; and as to table-turning and the like, she had always maintained they were rank impostures.

Looking back to the days of his childhood, Ken recollected vaguely she had had a few cherished superstitions. Nothing would have induced her to walk under a ladder or begin an enterprise on a Friday; while she never listened willingly to a ghost-story. Wonderful as it sounded, her son came reluctantly to the conclusion she really believed what she affirmed and that her present fears were solely due to some fancied apparition of the late Mr. Marks, though what could possibly have given her cause to fancy she had seen such a thing Ken was at a loss to guess.

"My dear mother!" he said, soothingly, "there are no such things as ghosts. Ask Emily, who is a strong-minded young lady, and she will tell you the same thing."

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Marks!" said Miss Taylor, gravely, "you need not be alarmed; the spirits of the departed cannot return to earth again, but await in Paradise the last great Day!"

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Marks, viciously; "of course you say that as your father was a clergyman."

It was strange to notice in her terror how utterly the veneer of fine ladyhood had passed from her talk and manners. Alicia Grant was not a lady when Douglas St. Clune married her. Nearly thirty years of good society had given her an external polish which would have deceived many; but in her terror she lost it, and passed back into the under-educated young person of her youth.

"But I have nothing to do with the clergy," said Kenneth, quietly; "and I tell you the same thing. It is quite impossible that you have seen a ghost! To begin with, there are no such things. Then if there were, Mr. Marks would not be entitled to one, since, according to all legends, they belong only to great families, and he was a self-made man."

He thought this agreement must be telling, but it made no impression. The tears rolled slowly down his mother's face.

"He was murdered," she said, peevishly, "so no wonder his spirit cannot rest!"

Kenneth possessed a rare gift—perfect self-control on an emergency. He was really deeply bewildered by his mother's statement. But he managed to appear as though they sounded to him the merest folly. He treated Mrs. Marks, in fact, with the well-meant severity often used to trace the nerves of a person in hysterics. He betrayed not a pang of the anxiety and pity he really felt, but returned coolly—

"If his spirit has rested for eighteen years—nearly nineteen, indeed—I don't see why it should begin to walk now, mother!"

"But it does!"

"Then it shall not walk here," was the resolute reply. "Emily shall get the servants to make me up a bed somewhere, and I will stay and guard the house. I promise you I will make short work of Mr. Ghost!"

Mrs. Marks looked relieved from a terrible dread. Kenneth had expected her to declare no one could keep out ghosts, that they penetrated through locked doors and bolted windows; but she seemed quite satisfied.

"You promise me, Ken," she said appealingly, "you promise me you will stay here all night! You are not deceiving me?"

"On my word, mother, I will stay. You will find me at breakfast if you are well enough to come down to it to-morrow—and I assure you no ghost shall enter the premises."

"It's the back drawing-room window," said Mrs. Marks, as though she were telling of something real that had actually happened; "that he comes by, and I don't know the time, but it's always before twelve. Emily, I will go to bed now; you need not stay to help me, for I feel much better. Go down with Kenneth, and see he has some supper."

The two were thankful for the dismissal; they longed for a chance to consult each other. Kenneth rang and ordered some strong coffee; then, with almost brotherly kindness, he put Emily into an easy chair and made her drink a cup before he would let her speak to him at all.

"I must go," she said, trying to get up.

"Why?"

"Your room—it must be got ready."

"I have no intention of going to bed. It's lucky I'm in a frock-coat, isn't it, for the same costume must appear at breakfast, and an evening suit would look dissipated."

"Do you really mean to sit up all night?"

"I do; I shall send you to bed in an hour, but first I must have some talk with you. How many servants are there?"

"Only two sleeping in the house."

"Are they trustworthy?"

"Thoroughly—they both know Mrs. Marks is suffering from a nervous attack, and that I sent for you."

"Right. You had better tell them she is much easier, and send them to bed. I suppose they sleep upstairs?"

"At the top of the house."

"Send them there at once, please. There is evidently some mystery going on, and before I talk about it I must be sure they are out of hearing."

"You might trust them," said Emily, indignantly. "Cook is from Combermere, and the parlour-maid is a niece of hers. I am certain they would not lead themselves to any deception."

"There is no reason they should not enjoy a good night's rest," said Ken, coolly; "send them to bed, and then come back to me."

She was gone hardly five minutes, when they heard the heavy tread of the servants as they went upstairs. A moment more, and the gas died slowly out of the burners; Lord Combermere jumped up and lighted two wax candles on the mantelpiece, or they would have been left in total darkness.

For some people the interview might have been embarrassing—a young man and a girl, both of marriageable age, both tolerably attractive, along at such an hour, with a sleeping household over their head; but no thought of the oddness of their *à-la-lite* troubled either

NOW IS THE TIME TO SECURE NEW YEAR PRESENTS FOR YOUR FRIENDS.



A CLUE TO THE MYSTERY.

Emily or the Earl. To begin with, they had been on almost fraternal terms in their childhood; and, besides that, their hearts were each occupied with the image of a person quite other than their old playfellow. The thought of Nell would guard Lord Combermere against all other fascinations. And there was a certain curate about whom Emily's warmest hopes were centred.

Young as they were, Miss Taylor and the Earl could discuss the matter which troubled them without a single thought of sentiment. It was more like two friends, or two school-fellows, meeting after a long interval, and at once directing all their energies to unravel a mystery which had sprang up during their separation.

"Tell me all you can," said Lord Combermere, simply. "And, Emily, don't spare me because I am her son. If there's anything I ought to know tell it me, however painful the knowledge must be!"

Emily opened her eyes.

"You speak as if you judged Mrs. Marks very harshly!" she said, reprovingly. "I will tell you all I can; but, let me say first, all that troubles her might have happened to anyone else. I know you and your mother don't always think alike; but, Lord Combermere, as far as I know about the matter, it might have happened to the Countess herself or even my own mother."

"Go on."

"It was about a week ago. Mrs. Marks had been to a party, and I was alone, practicing in the back drawing-room. The servants had gone to bed, so the house was very quiet. When I stopped playing I heard a strange noise, like footsteps."

"I always thought ghosts were noiseless in their movements," said the Earl, sarcastically.

"Please don't say anything until you have heard all. I felt frightened, and I went up-

stairs. My own room is next to the servants, and I was glad to feel myself near someone. I scolded myself well for my nervous fancies, but in the end I dropped asleep, and it was only the sound of Mrs. Marks's carriage coming home woke me."

"And it was then—?"

"Very nearly twelve; it struck the quarter as I went downstairs. I met Mrs. Marks at the door of the back drawing-room. Lord Combermere, I don't know what you will think of me, but you told me to tell you all. I am certain someone had been in the room since I left it!"

"Nonsense! Why?"

"Because there was a general air of things being disarranged; and a little blotting-case your mother uses to write her letters on was lying open on the ground. I stooped to pick it up, and Mrs. Marks told me I looked very tired, I had better go back to bed."

"Well?"

"I had hardly reached my own room when I heard a piercing shriek. I rushed down again, and found Mrs. Marks lying on the floor in a swoon!"

"I never knew my mother faint!"

"Nor I."

"And you picked her up as you had previously done by the blotting-case? The ghost seems to have a propensity for knocking things down."

"Please don't laugh!"

"Emily," he said, kindly, "don't you see I only try to laugh because I am most terribly bewildered. So far from jesting at your fears, I am only sorry for them. It must have been a terrible time for you!"

"Mrs. Marks revived at last, and cook and I got her upstairs. She asked me to sleep on the sofa in her room, and I was very glad to do so for company. The night passed very

peacefully, and in the morning she seemed herself."

"Didn't she refer at all to the swoon?"

"Yes; she said she ought not to have sat up so late. The remark puzzled me, for it was not twelve, and she is usually much later. She said nothing of any fright. I went round the back drawing-room myself, and I could miss nothing, so I decided my own fear of someone having entered the room must have been an idle fancy, and said nothing about it to Mrs. Marks."

"In fact you were both hiding something from each other. You kept from my mother your suspicion the house had been entered, and she did not let you know what had caused her swoon. It would have been better far had you confided in each other."

"Was it very wrong? I thought Mrs. Marks would only laugh at me, and—"

"It was not enough at all. My mother is just the woman not to believe anything she does not see herself. If she had not shared your fright, she would probably have laughed at it; but I am interrupting you."

"We went out as usual that day; but when the evening came Mrs. Marks kept me with her, she seemed as if she could not bear to be left alone. We sat in the front drawing-room, with the folding doors locked, a thing I had never known her order before."

"And all went well?"

"Perfectly. The next day Mrs. Marks seemed to have thrown off all her alarm. I went to bed at eleven, and she said she should sit up a little longer over her accounts."

"In the back drawing-room?"

"Yes."

"And did you hear any noise?"

"I am ashamed to say when I am once asleep it takes a great deal to wake me; but in the morning I went down for a book, and I then found Mrs. Marks—it was before the

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Now all was changed. Mr. Ashwin's account had alarmed Kenneth, but even that had not prepared him for the reality. His handsome, self-contained, dignified mother transformed into a nervous, trembling woman who shuddered hysterically at every sound, and actually clung to him for protection, begging him not to leave her!

It was so incredible Kenneth could hardly realise it.

And then, when he and Miss Taylor at last persuaded her to confide to them the cause of her terrors, her answer was the most marvellous thing of all. They asked her from what they were to protect her, and she said, "My husband's ghost!"

Kenneth looked at Miss Taylor, but her eyes were fixed steadily on the ground. She would not meet his gaze, and her silence seemed to say she would rather be asked her no questions till they were alone. The first thought which seized poor Lord Combermere was that his mother was mad. The second that she had been dabbling in the delights of table-rapping and spiritualistic sciences, until she grew bewildered. But neither of these explanations were probable.

Mrs. Marks was one of those selfish, complacent women who are the last people in the world to excite themselves into madness; and as to table-turning and the like, she had always maintained they were rank impostures.

Looking back to the days of his childhood, Ken recollected vaguely she had had a few cherished superstitions. Nothing would have induced her to walk under a ladder or begin an enterprise on a Friday; while she never listened willingly to a ghost-story. Wonderful as it sounded, her son came reluctantly to the conclusion she really believed what she affirmed and that her present fears were solely due to some fancied apparition of the late Mr. Marks, though what could possibly have given her cause to fancy she had seen such a thing Ken was at a loss to guess.

"My dear mother!" he said, soothingly, "there are no such things as ghosts. Ask Emily, who is a strong-minded young lady, and she will tell you the same thing."

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Marks!" said Miss Taylor, gravely, "you need not be alarmed; the spirits of the departed cannot return to earth again, but await in Paradise the last great Day!"

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Marks, viciously; "of course you say that as your father was a clergyman."

It was strange to notice in her terror how utterly the veneer of fine ladyhood had passed from her talk and manners. Alicia Grant was not a lady when Douglas St. Clune married her. Nearly thirty years of good society had given her an external polish which would have deceived many; but in her terror she lost it, and passed back into the under-educated young person of her youth.

"But I have nothing to do with the clergy," said Kenneth, quietly; "and I tell you the same thing. It is quite impossible that you have seen a ghost! To begin with, there are no such things. Then if there were, Mr. Marks would not be entitled to one, since, according to all legends, they belong only to great families, and he was a self-made man."

He thought this agreement must be telling, but it made no impression. The tears rolled slowly down his mother's face.

"He was murdered," she said, peevishly, "so no wonder his spirit cannot rest!"

Kenneth possessed a rare gift—perfect self-control on an emergency. He was really deeply bewildered by his mother's statement. But he managed to appear as though they sounded to him the merest folly. He treated Mrs. Marks, in fact, with the well-meant severity often used to trace the nerves of a person in hysterics. He betrayed not a pang of the anxiety and pity he really felt, but returned coolly—

"If his spirit has rested for eighteen years—nearly nineteen, indeed—I don't see why it should begin to walk now, mother!"

"But it does!"

"Then it shall not walk here," was the resolute reply. "Emily shall get the servants to make me up a bed somewhere, and I will stay and guard the house. I promise you I will make short work of Mr. Ghost!"

Mrs. Marks looked relieved from a terrible dread. Kenneth had expected her to declare no one could keep out ghosts, that they penetrated through locked doors and bolted windows; but she seemed quite satisfied.

"You promise me, Ken," she said appealingly; "you promise me you will stay here all night! You are not deceiving me?"

"On my word, mother, I will stay. You will find me at breakfast if you are well enough to come down to it to-morrow—and I assure you no ghost shall enter the premises."

"It's the back drawing-room window," said Mrs. Marks, as though she were telling of something real that had actually happened; "that he comes by, and I don't know the time, but it's always before twelve. Emily, I will go to bed now; you need not stay to help me, for I feel much better. Go down with Kenneth, and see he has some supper."

The two were thankful for the dismissal; they longed for a chance to consult each other. Kenneth rang and ordered some strong coffee; then, with almost brotherly kindness, he put Emily into an easy chair and made her drink a cup before he would let her speak to him at all.

"I must go," she said, trying to get up.

"Why?"

"Your room—it must be got ready."

"I have no intention of going to bed. It's lucky I'm in a frock-coat, isn't it, for the same costume must appear at breakfast, and an evening suit would look dissipated."

"Do you really mean to sit up all night?"

"I do; I shall send you to bed in an hour, but first I must have some talk with you. How many servants are there?"

"Only two sleeping in the house."

"Are they trustworthy?"

"Thoroughly—they both know Mrs. Marks is suffering from a nervous attack, and that I sent for you."

"Right. You had better tell them she is much easier, and send them to bed. I suppose they sleep upstairs?"

"At the top of the house."

"Send them there at once, please. There is evidently some mystery going on, and before I talk about it I must be sure they are out of hearing."

"You might trust them," said Emily, indignantly. "Cook is from Combermere, and the parlour-maid is a niece of hers. I am certain they would not lead themselves to any deception."

"There is no reason they should not enjoy a good night's rest," said Ken, coolly; "send them to bed, and then come back to me."

She was gone hardly five minutes, when they heard the heavy tread of the servants as they went upstairs. A moment more, and the gas died slowly out of the burners; Lord Combermere jumped up and lighted two wax candles on the mantelpiece, or they would have been left in total darkness.

For some people the interview might have been embarrassing—a young man and a girl, both of marriageable age, both tolerably attractive, along at such an hour, with a sleeping household over their head; but no thought of the oddness of their *à-la-lite* troubled either

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A CLUE TO THE MYSTERY.

Emily or the Earl. To begin with, they had been on almost fraternal terms in their childhood; and, besides that, their hearts were each occupied with the image of a person quite other than their old playfellow. The thought of Nell would guard Lord Combermere against all other fascinations. And there was a certain curate about whom Emily's warmest hopes were centred.

Young as they were, Miss Taylor and the Earl could discuss the matter which troubled them without a single thought of sentiment. It was more like two friends, or two school-fellows, meeting after a long interval, and at once directing all their energies to unravel a mystery which had sprang up during their separation.

"Tell me all you can," said Lord Combermere, simply. "And, Emily, don't spare me because I am her son. If there's anything I ought to know tell it me, however painful the knowledge must be!"

Emily opened her eyes.

"You speak as if you judged Mrs. Marks very harshly!" she said, reprovingly. "I will tell you all I can; but, let me say first, all that troubles her might have happened to anyone else. I know you and your mother don't always think alike; but, Lord Combermere, as far as I know about the matter, it might have happened to the Countess herself or even my own mother."

"Go on."

"It was about a week ago. Mrs. Marks had been to a party, and I was alone, practising in the back drawing-room. The servants had gone to bed, so the house was very quiet. When I stopped playing I heard a strange noise, like footsteps."

"I always thought ghosts were noiseless in their movements," said the Earl, sarcastically.

"Please don't say anything until you have heard all. I felt frightened, and I went up-

stairs. My own room is next to the servants, and I was glad to feel myself near someone. I scolded myself well for my nervous fancies, but in the end I dropped asleep, and it was only the sound of Mrs. Marks's carriage coming home woke me."

"And it was then—?"

"Very nearly twelve; it struck the quarter as I went downstairs. I met Mrs. Marks at the door of the back drawing-room. Lord Combermere, I don't know what you will think of me, but you told me to tell you all. I am certain someone had been in the room since I left it!"

"Nonsense! Why?"

"Because there was a general air of things being disarranged; and a little blotting-case your mother uses to write her letters on was lying open on the ground. I stooped to pick it up, and Mrs. Marks told me I looked very tired. I had better go back to bed."

"Well?"

"I had hardly reached my own room when I heard a piercing shriek. I rushed down again, and found Mrs. Marks lying on the floor in a swoon!"

"I never knew my mother faint!"

"Nor I."

"And you picked her up as you had previously done by the blotting-case? The ghost seems to have a propensity for knocking things down."

"Please don't laugh!"

"Emily," he said, kindly, "don't you see I only try to laugh because I am most terribly bewildered. So far from jesting at your fears, I am only sorry for them. It must have been a terrible time for you!"

"Mrs. Marks revived at last, and took and I got her upstairs. She asked me to sleep on the sofa in her room, and I was very glad to do so for company. The night passed very

peacefully, and in the morning she seemed herself."

"Didn't she refer at all to the swoon?"

"Yes; she said she ought not to have cut up so late. The remark puzzled me, for it was not twelve, and she is usually much later. She said nothing of any fright. I went round the back drawing-room myself, and I could miss nothing, so I decided my own fear of someone having entered the room must have been an idle fancy, and said nothing about it to Mrs. Marks."

"In fact you were both hiding something from each other. You kept from my mother your suspicion the house had been entered, and she did not let you know what had caused her swoon. It would have been better far had you confided in each other."

"Was it very wrong? I thought Mrs. Marks would only laugh at me, and—"

"It was not enough at all. My mother is just the woman not to believe anything she does not see herself. If she had not shared your fright, she would probably have laughed at it; but I am interrupting you."

"We went out as usual that day; but when the evening came Mrs. Marks kept me with her, she seemed as if she could not bear to be left alone. We sat in the front drawing-room, with the folding doors locked, a thing I had never known her order before."

"And all went well?"

"Perfectly. The next day Mrs. Marks seemed to have thrown off all her alarm. I went to bed at eleven, and she said she should sit up a little longer over her accounts."

"In the back drawing-room?"

"Yes."

"And did you hear any noise?"

"I am ashamed to say when I am once asleep it takes a great deal to wake me; but in the morning I went down for a book, and I then found Mrs. Marks—it was before the

THE ATTRACTIVE GIFTS ANNOUNCED ON PAGE 308 ARE SELLING LIKE "HOT CAKES."

servants were stirring—sitting on the sofa wringing her hands. She had not been in bed at all. From that time she has not been beyond the dressing-room, and she has seemed in an agony of nervous fear; the slightest sound will send her into hysterics. I had the knocker tied up, thinking the noise would trouble her. She did nothing but sit in a chair with an awful fixed look of expectancy, as though she knew that something terrible was coming, and would fain be ready for it. At last I persuaded her to send for Mr. Ashwin; but when he came she was in strong hysterics, so his visit was useless. Then I suggested sending for you. We had not known before you were in town, and she caught at the idea eagerly. I think your coming will save her life. She has hardly had an hour's proper sleep since that awful time when I found her here. When we left the room just now she whispered to me, 'Ken is here, I can sleep now.' Even if she awake to all her terrors, a good night's rest will be invaluable to her. I think if you had not come a few more hours of that awful feverish wakefulness must have killed her, or, at the least, unhinged her reason.

"You heard what she said to me to-night, that she begged me to protect her from her husband's ghost!"

"Yes."

"Had you had any idea before what it was she feared particularly?"

"No; I knew she had some special dread, and I begged her to tell me what it was, but she only shook her head, and said I should not understand; I was only a child nineteen years ago, and could not remember. Over and over again I asked her what it was she saw that fearful night, and what happened to give her such a fear of this room, but it was no use. I think she would have liked to tell me, but some inner feeling held her back. I was at my wit's end. I sent for the doctor, but she would say nothing to him, and I dared not tell him all I have told you; it seemed like a breach of confidence in me. I could only wait until the bright thought came of asking her to send for Mr. Ashwin."

"What did the doctor say?"

"That she had sustained a terrible shock to the nervous system, as if I did not know that before. He sent some composing mixture, but she wouldn't take it."

"My poor Emily, you have had a dreary time of it."

"I got frightened," confessed the girl. "You see, Mrs. Marks would not tell me what she feared; and to see the awful terror she was in, and yet be powerless to help her, was very painful. I knew the Countess was in town, and I would have sent for her, but your mother forbade it."

"I am glad of that. Poor Aunt Lucy would be simply terrified and of no real help, since my mother never took to her. Emily, do you feel strong enough to stay here while I put things right?"

"As if I would leave Mrs. Marks now!" said the girl, half indignantly. "Why, Lord Combermere, if I went away while she was in this state I think the fears which haunt her would pass over to me. Apart from all thought of my duty to her, I should like to know the truth of the mystery."

"And Mr. Mayo?"

Miss Taylor blushed.

"What of him?"

"I understood he had a right to express an opinion of your doings, that's all. Am I to congratulate you, Emily?"

"Some day," said the girl, blushing. "We hope it may be next year. Edward has a charming curacy in Kent, and he thinks by January—"

"A curacy? You are not ambitious, child?"

"What is ambition if we are happy?" said Emily, archly. "Besides, this is not a common curacy!"

"What makes it an uncommon one?"

"The vicar is his own patron, and he means to give the living to Edward."

"Indeed! And where is it?"

"Marden."

"Where?"

"Ah, you never heard of it, perhaps; it is only a little village near Maidstone."

"Never heard of it! Only a little village! To his life's end Kenneth St. Clune would remember Marden for the sake of the blue-eyed girl who had once lived there; but men don't wear their hearts on their sleeves, and so he answered quite composedly—"

"It so happens I have heard of Marden. In fact, I went there over a year ago."

"Ah! Edward was not there then; he only went last summer."

"And you think 'Edward,' as you call him, will have no objection to your remaining in this tomb of mystery?"

"I am sure he would wish me to do what is right; and, Lord Combermere, please, I want to stay."

"And I am only too thankful for you to do so. Then that's settled. Now, Emily, for the next question—what has my mother seen?"

Emily shivered.

"I don't know."

"Neither do I; but I mean to find out."

"How?"

"And you must help me. Prosaic folks like you and I don't believe in ghosts, but there is a strong vein of superstition in my mother's nature. I think we may safely conclude she believes that she has seen her husband's ghost?"

"Oh, yes."

"Has she ever spoken of him to you?"

"Never."

"I don't know much of him. I was under seven when he died; but since I have been grown up I have gathered he was not exactly a connection to be proud of. Now, Emily, dismissing the ghost theory, we have but one alternative to fall back on. Someone dressed themselves up as Mr. Marks's ghost to work on my mother's fears."

"But what good would it do them?"

"I don't know; I confess I am all in the dark; I can only just grasp the main fact. I am pretty certain I am right in that."

Emily shook her head.

"If the object was to gain money, why didn't they do it before?"

"I told you I couldn't fill in the details."

"It would have been so much easier," persisted Emily. "How could anyone remember just how he looked nearly twenty years ago, and Mrs. Marks would not have been frightened unless the resemblance was very real?"

"My mother is fond of money," said Kenneth, slowly; "she may have refused to help Marks's poor relations (though I never heard of his having any), and one of them got up this device to alarm her."

Emily shuddered.

"I suppose he was really dead?"

"My dear child!" exclaimed Lord Combermere, startled, "you must be getting as nervous as my poor mother, and I shall have the Rev. Edward charging me of having ruined your health, if you take such ideas into your head. Poor Marks is as dead as a door-nail! He was murdered."

"Who by?"

She little knew how much poor Kenneth would have given to be able to answer that question so as to satisfy himself.

"I do not know."

"And why?"

"No one knows."

"He seems to have been a strange man altogether," said Emily, sagely.

"He was. He inherited a handsome fortune from his partner just before his marriage with my mother. He was most economical; the last man in the world to be reckless with money; but, after his death, no trace of the legacy could be found."

Emily looked up.

"Does Mrs. Marsh know of it?"

"I believe (remember, please, I was a small child at the time of the murder) it was sup-

posed the murderer made off with the spoil. It had been realised a few days before, and was in gold and notes in a small iron box about a foot square, with bands round it to make it stronger, and a patent lock. I have been told at the time of the murder, and for years after, my poor mother cherished the dream of finding this box either herself or through the police. Its contents would have made her a rich woman, you know, so perhaps it is natural she should have harped on it. The late Earl told me she could not see a box of the same size and description for years without suspecting it to be the one stolen from her husband."

"How very strange! Do you know she thinks of it still?"

"No. Has she spoken of it to you?"

"Yes, twice; but you see not having heard the story I could not understand what she meant. The first time was as she was recovering from the swoon. She just whispered to me, 'It must be the box. Fancy coming for the box after all these years, and you know I never had it, or I should have been a rich woman!'"

"And the second time?"

"It was when she was expecting Mr. Ashwin. She shook her head sadly, and told me you said he was clever, but she had never much faith in him, for he could not find the box!"

"It would not do her much good if he did," said Lord Combermere, simply. "It is hardly likely the thief would not use the money purchased by his crime, and as by culpable carelessness no list of the numbers of the notes was taken, the lucky possessor could spend every penny."

"But was no one suspected of the murder?"

"Yes," and he told her the story of Andrew Gordon as the world knew it. Emily shook her head.

"He didn't do it, I am sure!"

"How can you be sure?" asked Kenneth, impressed by her words, and feeling he would give years of his life to prove them true.

"Why, he had no cause!" said Emily quickly. "If he had meant to commit murder he would have done it in his time of poverty, not when a good situation was ready for him. Besides, he died of heart disease!"

"What has that to do with it?"

"My sister is a hospital nurse, and so I know a little of illness. If Mr. Gordon had heart disease so seriously as to cause his death, the excitement of killing a fellow-creature would have produced the catastrophe at once. Now you say he went home well and cheerful, and spent some hours happily with his family. No, Lord Combermere. Whoever killed your stepfather be sure that man did not!"

"And yet his memory must lie under the stigma!"

"Not with honest-minded people, who are not blinded by prejudice!"

"It has always seemed to me terrible. His widow died believing him a murderer. If ever his daughter bore his name she would be scorned as a criminal's child!"

"Nonsense!"

"It is quite true."

"It is the merest prejudice. Do you mean to tell me," cried Emily, warming with excitement, "that a girl brought up in utter ignorance of her parentage could be condemned by anyone if they learned that when she was a baby her father was accused (not condemned, mind!) of murder? Why, the idea is absurd!"

"It is the way of the world. No mother would let her children associate with such a one. No man would dare to marry her!"

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself," said Miss Taylor, flatly; "it's quite bad enough for children to be punished for what their parents do, mind you. I think that's cruelty; but to make them suffer just for what their parents may perhaps have done, is simple barbarity. Why, I thought the English law held everyone innocent till they were proved to be guilty! You seem to go right against

that when you are so cruelly hard on Andrew Gordon's child!"

He hard on her! He who would so gladly have taken her to his heart and sheltered her from all pain! But he only shook hands with Emily a little more warmly than usual, and said not another word of the matter they had disputed over.

But not till long afterwards did she understand why, when he had given her her candle, and bade her sleep well and forget all about ghosts, he added, in a voice of peculiar tenderness:

"Heaven bless you, Emily! There would be less sorrow in the world if all women had your charity!"

She was gone.

He heard her light footsteps mount the stairs and die away. He was alone, and no nearer solving the problem of his mother's fears than when he left her room. He knew the house well, for Mrs. Marks had insisted on his going with her to see it before it was taken, and once or twice since he had been escorted by her on a triumphant progress round it to view alterations and improvements.

It was just such a house as a widow of aristocratic ideas and moderate (very moderate of late) income would be likely to take, provided she had not a family to exceed the very limited sleeping accommodation.

It was semi-detached and in shape high and narrow, the architect evidently having tried to do with as little frontage as possible. All the offices were underground, and, as the door leading to the basement premises was locked at night, Kenneth felt he might dismiss that part of the house from his inquiries.

To begin with, the ground-floor, the dining-room, a long narrow room, ran from back to front, and one end had been fitted up as a library, and with curtains drawn made quite a separate apartment, but both windows were provided with heavy shutters, which Kenneth found securely fastened. Half way upstairs was a little room of no particular name, where needlework was done or servants interviewed. This had no shutters, but the window was so small and so high above the ground, access seemed impossible from the yard running at the back of the house; above were the drawing-rooms, divided by folding doors. It was here Mrs. Marks's improvements began. To hide the view of the yard she had had the window of the back drawing-room filled with glass, in imitation of stained glass; and a balcony beyond, thrown out and covered in, so as to form a mild attempt at a conservatory—very mild, since the covering only extended on two sides; but still green shrubs flourished there, and had a very pretty effect.

Mrs. Marks's next-door neighbour had emulated her example, and both ladies being of a thrifty turn—and, besides, being friends, and trusting to each other's honesty—no barrier, except the original iron railing, which had served to divide the balconies originally, separated the rival conservatories.

It flashed on Kenneth suddenly it would be possible—nay, easy—for his mother's next-door neighbour to effect an entry into the back drawing-room by way of the conservatories. He dismissed the idea at once.

Mrs. Warburton was a rich Anglo-Indian widow, many years older than Mrs. Marks, who kept no company, and retired to rest at ten every night of her life. She had the warmest admiration for her next-door neighbour—founded, perhaps, on her aristocratic connections; in fact, the two widows "got on" perfectly, and it was preposterous to think Mrs. Warburton would have lent herself to any plan likely to alarm or molest Mrs. Marks. Besides, apart from wish, she would not have had the power. She had lived in India thirty years. Mr. Marks must have been a boy when she went, and when she returned he had been dead ten years; therefore she could never have seen him, and could have been of no use in helping anyone to get themselves up to

represent him, even if she had known anyone likely to want to play such a trick.

"It gets more puzzling at every turn," thought poor Kenneth. "If something isn't found out, I shall have my mother in a brain fever. And yet I'm sure I don't see how to set about finding anything out. I thought I had made a brilliant discovery when I told Emily the ghost was someone dressed up to represent Mr. Marks; but I'm afraid she's right, and the theory's improbable, as she says. Why should anyone want to represent him; and if anyone did, they could only get in through the Warburtons, and the old lady is too old to think of playing tricks! Upon my word, I shall begin to declare presently it was an optical illusion, and there never was anyone at all; but then, my mother is the last woman in the world to imagine things, and Emily declared she heard something. I don't know what to do. I declare, if nothing comes of to-night's researches, I'll bundle the two off to Brighton to-morrow and put this house under some ancient caretaker, who'll sleep too soundly to be afraid of ghosts."

Kenneth was getting sleepy himself, or, rather, exhausted. Sleepy means, generally, a pleasant inclination to sleep, but there is another feeling often called by the same name, which is anything but pleasant, and quite a different thing from that wholesome desire to sleep we often feel after fatigue.

Who among us—except, perhaps, the very young—has not felt that jaded, worn-out sensation, when we feel as if we had come to the end of our tether, and could undertake no more?—when all we do requires such an increasing effort we long to desist. It is not sleep that haunts our eyes, but an intense desire to end the strain laid upon us, and let the reaction come. Nature is worn out, mind and body need repose, and if we can but relax the pressure we shall sink first into a state of inaction, when we make no effort, listless, give no sign of wakefulness, and yet are as powerfully conscious of all that goes on as we were at noon. It is not panic, it is not pleasure, this strange transitory state, but the penalty nature demands for the overstrain and extra fatigue we have loaded on her. If undisturbed it passes slowly into sleep, but in the first stages it is far more like a waking trance than slumber.

Into this state fell Kenneth. He was not unconscious; he knew where he was and why he was there; but he had ceased his efforts to elucidate the mystery. He had felt his own laden brain would snap if he required more thought at its hands, and he threw himself in an armchair—and waited.

Truly he had gone through enough that day! He had discovered his own secret and realised he loved a girl whose father had perhaps murdered his mother's husband. This and all it involved was agony enough; but more had been heaped on Kenneth. He had had to meet the beautiful heiress the world thought his future bride. He had had to be polite to her, to promise his favourite relation he would "think seriously" of the marriage. From that he came to his mother's, to find her well-nigh bereft of reason by sudden fear, and the fear so inseparably connected with his only sorrow.

He was young and healthy, but he had gone through enough to try the strongest nerves. It was hardly wonderful he lay as one worn out, that the effort to think had almost ceased, and he was nigh passing from a waking trance to slumber—well-nigh passing, but not passed. A slight noise, so slight it would have been unnoticed by ears less painfully acute, it roused Kenneth from the sleepiness stealing over him. He started to his feet, conscious of all he had been hearing from Emily Taylor, and like her on the evening when poor Mrs. Marks's fears began, conscious of one thing more—that he was not alone!

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2010. Back numbers can be obtained through any Newsagent.)

Society

THE King-Emperor and Queen Alexandra have definitely decided to drive to Westminster Abbey on Coronation Day in the old historical State coach. This vehicle, which is truly described as "the most superb carriage ever built," was designed by Sir William Chambers. The paintings on the panels and doors are the work of Cipriani, and the coach was completed so long ago as in the year 1761.

THROUGH the side panels of the State coach are of glass, it is not easy to see the occupants clearly, which is disappointing to the man in the street who wishes to see the features of his King and beautiful Queen. Therefore their Majesties have determined to use an open carriage for the long Coronation procession, which it is expected will take place on the day before the Coronation. The open State carriage, which will also be upholstered in rose-coloured satin, will rival in magnificence its splendid prototype.

It is stated that their Majesties will in all probability call at Westminster Hall on their way back to Buckingham Palace on the day after the Coronation for a short ceremony, and this, it is understood, will merely be for the purpose of receiving addresses and enabling peers to take the oath of allegiance. To what an extent it will be necessary to fit up the historic building for this purpose is not at present known, but in any case the ceremony is not likely to be at all prolonged, in view of the fact that, according to present arrangements, it will take place at the conclusion of the procession on the second day, in the performance of which the Royal party will, it is estimated, cover a distance of not less than fourteen miles.

QUEEN ALEXANDRA, who has always shown a sympathetic and practical interest in hospital work, as the London Hospital for one has good reason to know, has been for some time, it is rumoured, maturing a large scheme for helping hospitals generally. Her Majesty's plans may be unfolded to the public about the time of the Coronation by way of giving the new movement an historic inauguration. For the present it is enough to say that some of the influential governors at certain hospitals are already in consultation with Her Majesty respecting the proposed scheme, and that the confident belief is that it will prove as beneficial to the hospitals as the scheme inaugurated by the King, as Prince of Wales, some years ago.

THE speeches of the Prince of Wales are all the more remarkable when it is known that he does not, like many Royal personages, leave the composition to a member of his staff but prepares them, down to the smallest particular, himself. This was the case on his recent tour, when no one of his very numerous utterances was in any respect prompted. His Royal Highness is indeed very independent in this respect, and now that he is in a position of perhaps rather more freedom, if greater responsibility, than before, it will not be surprising if his public speeches show a good deal of originality.

PEACE.

The heart where peace abides is like the ocean,
Whose depths the surface storms can never move.

But still abides in deep, unruffled quiet,
For all the foam-flecked waves that roll above.

The heart where peace abides is like the heaven,
The limpid dome where clouds in sudden might

May come and go; but through each rift appearing

The blue shines forth the same, serene and bright.

Oh! send our hearts this blessed peace, great Father!

That thus endowed and cheered through Thy dear love

This life becomes to us, Thy faulty children,
A foretaste of the better life above.

THE GOLDEN HOPE

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

Lady Redwoods, the owner and undisputed proprietor of all the fair domain of Redwoods, has been left a widow a year or more previous to the opening of the story. Lord Redwoods left no heir, but expressed a wish that on the decease of his wife the estates should pass to their nephew, Andrew Forsythe, and never doubted Lady Redwoods's compliance with his wishes. Mr. Forsythe was musing over many things, and wondering what would happen to him should his aunt marry again. Judge then of his surprise when Lady Redwoods tells him the story of her early life. Secretly married when quite a girl, in order not to arouse the anger of her brother, with whom she was living in India, there came a day when it was necessary to tell all, and the scene that followed caused Lady Redwoods to fall into convulsions, and she lay ill for many weeks. On returning to life and consciousness, it was to find herself a widow and a mother.

Sir Richard Haughton, although but twenty-seven, has lost all joy in life through an unhappy marriage. News is brought to him that his divorced wife, Margaret Sorel, is dying, and the messenger eagerly begs an interview on the pretext that Margaret desires Sir Richard's forgiveness. Margaret fails to requite the old love, and swears that no other woman shall ever become his wife.

Now Lady Redwoods's brother is dead, and as an act of reparation has sent all the necessary proofs of her first marriage, but the secret of the identity of her own child dies with him. The two girls are coming to England, and it is for Lady Redwoods to discover which of the two is her daughter. After a little hesitation in coming to so momentous a decision, the choice falls on Cecile, who at once sets to work to ingratiate herself with Lady Redwoods at the expense of her foster-sister Hellice, and in this she is ably seconded by the Hindoo ayah. Cecile's relationship is proclaimed to the assembled household; and to Hellice, who watches this rejoicing without one pang of envy, there suddenly comes a feeling of loneliness, and she turns unobserved into the garden to seek comfort among the shade of the trees. It is thus that she discovers Sir Richard Haughton, who for one moment gazes on the lovely vision ere it is lost to view. "I must see her again," he says. "Whoever and whatever she is I recognise her as my fate."

CHAPTER IX. Continued.

While she was thus absorbed in sorrowful reveries Cecile ran through the wide halls, up the statue-niched staircase, to her own apartments.

Entering her boudoir, which was deserted, she flung herself upon a couch beside the window, and gave herself up to anger, actually sobbing with rage.

"It is not for the paltry money that I grieve," she said, in a whisper, "though it is bad enough to lose a single guinea of her possessions, but that she should even seem to doubt that I am her child—that she should wish to enrich that hateful Hellice—that she should even think kindly of her—it is that that stings me. I cannot endure it. I will not submit to it."

With a quick, impetuous movement, at variance with the indolent repose natural to her character, Cecile clapped her hands together thrice as a summons to her attendant.

The echo had scarcely died away when the ayah entered from an inner chamber, and approached the maiden's couch with swift, noiseless tread.

"Tears, my sweet!" she exclaimed, in astonishment, looking upon the flushed face of her young mistress. "Tears, my pretty golden-haired darling! Who has dared to grieve you? Who has dared to wound your feelings?" Her tone grew fierce, and she looked around as if in search of someone upon whom to wreak her vengeance. "Tell Renee, my pet!"

She knelt down beside the couch and drew to her breast the little sunny head of Cecile, and bent over it her berry-brown face, illumined with a strong and passionate affection.

Her black, keen eyes grow very soft as they beamed upon the lily-like beauty of her darling, and in incoherent tones she murmured in Hindostanee words of tenderest import.

"Tell me, my sweet English flower," she said, heaping caresses upon the maiden; "Renee will avenge you."

But Cecile wept on, soothed by the fierce sympathy of her ayah, and it was some time—a period of torture to Renee—before she sobbed:—

"Renee, she—mamma—is going to leave part of her fortune to Hellice. It is shameful. I hate Hellice. I always hated her, but now more than ever."

"Renee hates her too," cried the Hindoo, fiercely. "What? Shall she come between you and the great fortune which I foretold you should possess? Shall she lessen your gold, your land, and your honours? Never, while Renee lives. Does Lady Redwoods fancy that she may have been mistaken and that Hellice may be her child?"

The ayah's eyes glistened like those of a tigress, and she put her hand to her bosom as if to grasp a concealed weapon.

"No, she says not, but she has a vague doubt, I know. What if that doubt should deepen? What if, by her arts, Hellice should win my place?"

"She never will!" cried Renee, confidently, speaking in her native tongue, and clasping her young mistress closer. "Before that day can arrive Renee will sweep Hellice and Lady Redwoods and that sharp-eyed lawyer—all of them—from your path like figures from a chess-board. Hush your weeping, my blue-eyed bird. Do you think Renee is stupid and blind, and that her brains and her hands are paralysed?"

Cecile dried her tears and looked up into the darkly significant face of her attendant.

"What do you mean, Renee?" she faltered, tears studding her eyelashes like glistening gems.

Again Renee directed a cautious, guilty look about the apartment, and then she scrutinised her young mistress closely, as if to estimate her probable reception of her purposed communication. Satisfied that that reception would be favourable, she arranged herself comfortably in a kneeling position and cast about in her own mind for words in which to clothe her hideous thoughts.

CHAPTER X.

Margaret Sorel, from her concealment among the ruins at Sea View, continued to watch with gloomy, envious eyes the movements of Hellice Glintwick and Sir Richard Haughton in their progress to the gate; but when the East Indian girl had hastened alone on her return to Redwoods, the actress crept from her shelter, crossed the broken upper floor, regardless of pitfalls, and rapidly descended the stairs.

She paused a moment at its foot in indecision, but a sudden impulse brought a ruddy glow to her cheeks and a fierce sparkle to her black eyes.

Acting upon that impulse, she gathered up her robust figure with an attempt at stateliness, drew around her like classic drapery her ample cloak, and with slow and measured steps quitted the ruins and walked down the long avenue to the gate at which the Baronet lingered.

He was still standing there, oblivious of her approach and of the scene around him, conscious only of a slender girlish figure moving along the road in the distance—a figure bright with scarlet and gold, and instinct with a wild, free, and exquisite grace.

He was looking after her with a longing tenderness, his soul in his glowing face, and his divorced wife, as she paused beside him, could see that a wondrous light was shining in his eyes—well up from his very soul—the light of a pure, holy, and passionate love, such as he had never bestowed upon her.

Her soul was on fire with jealous rage at her discovery.

Her fierce eyes blazed, her countenance as-

sumed the menacing expression it had worn at their parting on the previous day, and when she would have spoken only a hoarse whisper issued from her lips.

And still, unconscious of her presence, Sir Richard Haughton's soul remained steeped in a blissful reverie, beside which the optimist's paradise would have seemed a frightful pandemonium.

For a full minute the picture remained unchanged, and then, as if warned of the presence of an enemy, the Baronet started, looked up, and abruptly retreated several paces, his countenance expressing astonishment and aversion.

It seemed to him as though, after dreaming of an angel, he had awakened to find himself face to face with a hideous Medusa.

The divorced wife comprehended his manner, and as he turned to leave her presence without speaking, she sprang forward, clutched his arm fiercely, and, lifting one arm aloft as if invoking maledictions upon him, hissed one word—

"Beware!"

With that word ringing in his ears she passed out of the gate, leaving him to the changed currents of his thoughts.

A few moments later a strange, mocking laugh floated back to him, and he shuddered at its sound, and with slow steps returned to his dwelling.

The woman sped on for some distance as if pursued, then turned into the grove through an unlatched gate, and proceeded to a little dell, in the security of which she had left her horse.

She found him without difficulty, mounted, and rode out again into the high road, spurring on her steed to the extent of its greatest speed.

Margaret Sorel was devoid of the softer graces that heighten, like dewdrops on a rose, the loveliness of woman.

Her soul was fierce, keen, and strong; and but for her wild, mad love of her former husband, she would have been as emotionless as a statue. But even that love could not wholly change her masculine qualities.

She rode along, moody and silent, never breaking into those moans and wails to which younger or weaker women would have given way, and never once murmuring a word by which her state of mind might be guessed.

Once or twice she struck her horse savagely, finding relief in the sufferings of the poor animal, and she compressed her lips together in a sternly resolute manner, and looked gloomily from out her stern black eyes upon a landscape which, in her bitterness and rage, she would have ploughed with salt.

She had proceeded two or three miles in this manner when she was aroused from her hateful, angry thoughts by the approach of a horseman, who slackened his speed on beholding her, and who halted under a tree, waiting for her to come up to him. He was her brother, Mr. Thomas Sorel. As she came nearer he looked at her with an anxious countenance, and exclaimed,—

"Well, Margaret, what luck?"

"The worst," she answered, savagely, checking her horse to a walk.

"You did not see him, then?" inquired her brother, adapting his speed to hers.

"Yes, I saw him!" replied the woman, in a jerking manner, as if every word cost her a pang. "I went to Sea View, and hid myself among the ruins, intending to bring about another interview with him. But while I was concealed there a young girl came to make a sketch of the place, I suppose, for she carried a drawing portfolio in her hand. He followed her to the ruins, talked with her, escorted her to the gate, and looked after her with a look he never gave to me. I know he loves her!"

She concluded her speech in a cold, hard voice; her eyes shone fiercely, her face burned with a fiery glow, and her lips were set in an intensely bitter and unreconciled expression, that testified to her brother that she would not let events take their rightful course.

"Who is this young girl?" he asked.

"He called her, or she called herself, Hellice Glinwick. It's an odd name, and she is a remarkable-looking girl. I never saw her counterpart. I thought she had a foreign look, but she spoke English perfectly."

"I know who she is," exclaimed Mr. Sorel. "She is Lady Redwoode's niece, lately come from India. I heard at our inn this morning that Lady Redwoode's daughter, by a first marriage, has come home, bringing a cousin with her. It is the chief subject of gossip in the village, for the Redwoode servants have told everybody about the young heiress who looks like an angel, and about her cousin, who is even more lovely. Did you think her beautiful, Margaret?"

"Don't ask me!" she returned fiercely. "Do you wish me to praise my rival in his love? Would you have me prate of a beauty which I hate, and which I would destroy if I had the power? I read a story once of a Russian lady who had a rival, and one evening she contrived to entrap this rival to her own dwelling on some trivial pretext, then she bound her, seared her face with hot irons, and transformed all that magnificent beauty that had won her lover's heart into a hideous scar. Would that I might do the same with this young girl whom Sir Richard Haughton loves!"

Her brother was frightened at her vehemence and malignity, and looked at her with an expression of fear.

"I should not like to offend you, Margaret," he said, involuntarily.

"You think me terrible?" she asked, with a curling lip. "You do not half comprehend me, Mr. Thomas Sorel. I am a very demon in my hate. My anger is like a simoon that destroys all whom it touches!"

She spoke with a fierce impetuosity that increased his awe of her.

"I offered him love," she continued, musingly, "but if he continues to refuse it I shall become to him a terrible Nemesis. He shall have no cup of joy but what I will poison it; he shall have no hopes but I will turn to horrible fears; his smiles I will turn to tears, and his laughter to wailing! Sir Richard Haughton had better have died in the hour he scorned me!"

Mr. Sorel shuddered at her menacing tone, and said:—

"You can depend upon me always, Margaret. I don't like this proud Baronet, and I should like to see him humbled. It is possible that you may win him back again. They say that love never dies, and that the first affection can never be subdued. Give him a chance to see you under more favourable auspices. Heighten your beauty by the arts you understand so well. My motto, like yours, shall be 'Love or Revenge!'"

The actress stretched out her gauntleted hand and Mr. Sorel clasped it, as a seal to the bond between them. He winced slightly under her fierce, strong grasp, and when she released his hand he looked at it with a rueful face. They then rode on slowly without speaking.

Mr. Sorel was the first to break the silence. Happening to put his hand to his breast, he started and exclaimed:—

"Ah! I had nearly forgotten. I have good news for you, Margaret. Here are some letters that arrived for you after you had set out for Sea View. Your godmother is dead at last and has left you all she possessed, much more than we dreamed of. The lawyer who wrote says the property amounts to about three thousand pounds, besides that gloomy out-of-the-world Rookery in which she lived during the seventy years. Read for yourself."

He handed her a packet of letters, and the actress took them and perused them as if she felt not a particle of interest in their contents. But on reading the lawyer's formal epistle her countenance warmed a little, and she said:—

"This legacy comes at the right time, Thomas. I am incapable now of standing before crowded audiences and declaiming the

woes and passions of others when my heart seems a mass of seething fire. The sight of Sir Richard Haughton has made me mad, I think. My thoughts are all of him. When I sleep I dream of him. Waking, I scheme continually to win him back to me. It is a relief to be able to forget the petty wants and cares which I have laboured to provide for. Three thousand pounds will be a little fortune to me."

"But the Rookery—you will sell that?"

"No, I may need it as a harbour of refuge," answered the woman, grimly. "It comes to me at the right time. I doubt if in all England there can be found a more retired dwelling than the Rookery. Perhaps, when I have failed in everything but the wreaking of my revenge I may bury myself at the Rookery and abjure the hateful world!"

"It is as well to keep it, perhaps. We ought to leave here to-day, Margaret, and look after this property of yours—"

"I cannot, will not, leave this place yet!" interrupted the woman, quickly. "I would rather lose every penny of this legacy than leave Sir Richard Haughton to the fascinations of this East Indian girl, and I not here to watch them! I will empower you to act for me. My godmother's lawyer knows you well, and you can take possession of the property in my name. The money you can place to my credit in the bank. You can visit the Rookery, see if the old servant is alive yet, and make arrangements with her for remaining in my service. When you have done all this you can return here, where I shall be awaiting you."

Mr. Sorel would have made some objections to this plan, but he was accustomed to defer in all things to his sister's stronger will and to look upon her decisions as irrevocable. So he acceded to her wishes, promising a faithful observance of them, and neither spoke again until their ride had terminated.

At the moment of concluding their arrangement they had come upon the brink of a hill, below which nestled the pretty little village of Wharton, the market-town and railway-station nearest Redwoode and Sea View. It consisted of a long, pleasant street, green with the plentiful foliage of the trees, among which picturesque homes were embowered. At one end of the village the street widened into a square, in which the inn, the few public buildings, several shops, and a market were situated. It bore the name of Market Square.

In the inn, which was known as the Cat and Maggie, Margaret Sorel and her brother had found refuge, after leaving the roadside inn to which we first introduced the former to the reader. Their present quarters were comfortable, and within six miles of Sea View, a very desirable qualification for the scheming, divorced wife.

The brother and sister rode along the quiet village street, unmindful of the anxious, wondering stare of the pedestrians they encountered, and cantered into the inn court, where they dismounted, and gave their steeds in charge of a stable-boy. They then ascended to the sitting-room which they shared in common.

Miss Sorel's first act was to tear off her riding-hat and fling it upon the floor; her second to take possession of a chair, and pull off her gloves with a roughness that reduced them to absolute ruin. Then, with a moody, gloomy look, she repeated and amplified her directions concerning her newly-acquired property, and enjoined him to set out at once upon her business.

"But what will you do in my absence, Margaret?" said Mr. Sorel, hesitatingly.

"I will look after Sir Richard's affairs," she answered. "I must see this girl face to face, learn if she is likely to look favourably upon Sir Richard, and, in short, make her acquaintance. I shall do nothing rashly, and shall be careful under what circumstances I next obtrude my presence upon the man who was my husband. I shall be cunning—as

cunning as a serpent, but I fear not quite so harmless as a dove. I have henceforth but one motive in life—to win back the love of Sir Richard Haughton, or to wreak a deadly revenge upon him and this girl who has dared to look kindly upon him."

Her voice had a startling intonation that caused her weaker-minded brother again to look frightened. He moved away from her and began to engage in his task of packing a portmanteau, looking at her now and then from under his brows in an apprehensive way that would have pleased and flattered his sister had she not been too preoccupied to notice it. When he had thrust clothing, brushes, bottles, and other appurtenances of the toilet into a heterogeneous mass, and had locked his valise, he looked at his watch and said:—

"The first train leaves in a few minutes, Margaret, and I must be off. I shall be back as soon as I can finish the business. If you should need me, you can telegraph to the Rookery. Good-bye."

He shook hands with her, took up his valise, and departed.

The divorced wife remained in her seat, plunged in a gloomy reverie, for a full hour after his departure. The subject of her thoughts could only be guessed at from such indications as her lowering brow, her compressed, determined lips, and her strange habit of clasp- ing her hands so tightly that her sharp nails were embedded in her flesh. She did not speak, or give vent to a sign of emotion, but remained quiet and almost motionless; at last she arose with a heavy sigh and began pacing the floor.

In her progress to and fro she happened to catch a glimpse of her reflection in a small mirror between the windows; she went up to it and surveyed it earnestly, with something of a scornful glance. With one hand she put back the heavy masses of hair from her face, that not a line nor trace of her gipsy beauty might escape her observation, but there was little triumph or exultation in her gaze.

"My face has changed since it won him," she thought. "He used to call me his Juno. I am anything but a goddess in his eyes now. And yet I cannot believe that my power over him is entirely gone. For all these years he has lived a hermit's life for love of me. If I could only break down the barrier of his pride, he would take me back again. His parents are dead, his uncle is a harmless lunatic, and there is no one to stand between us—no one but this East Indian girl for whom he has conceived a short-lived fancy. If she were removed from his path I could win him back."

She turned that last thought over and over in her mind until it grew to a hideous significance. Then she proceeded to map out her plans with clearness, deciding what she should do in any and every turn of events, and in the end reasoned herself into a state of quiet hopefulness.

By this time it was past noon, and she rang for her luncheon, which was brought to her without delay. She sipped her chocolate and ate her roll leisurely and thoughtfully, and when she had finished her repast, and its fragments had been removed, she supplemented it with a glass of wine that brought a steady redness to her cheeks and an unwavering brightness to her eyes. Producing a small-sized travelling-bag, she then packed it with articles from her trunks that properly belonged to her theatrical wardrobe, adding to her clothing a small mirror, some boxes of white and carmine powders, a bottle containing a liquid dye for the complexion, and various other necessities of a stage toilet.

It was in a new theatre of operations and amid new scenes that the actress intended to use them now.

When her arrangements were all completed she summoned a servant and stated, to avoid being made the object of curious conjecture, that she was going on a visit to a friend in the neighbourhood, and might not return until late at night or early next day. This explanation accounted for her travelling-bag, and she ordered her horse to be saddled, confident

that the inmates of the inn would not trouble themselves concerning her movements.

Her order was speedily obeyed, for Miss Sorel was liberal of gratuities. She mounted, and rode through the village in the direction from which she had lately come.

When she had gained the hill beyond the rows of habitations, she gave rein to her horse and sped onwards between the green, blossoming hedges and in the shade of the trees that here and there almost embowered the road. She passed Sea View at a smart pace, looking stealthily at it from under her lashes, half hoping and half fearing to meet Sir Richard Haughton.

She noticed that a couple of well-bred horses were standing before his door, although they were at the end of a long avenue, and she noticed upon the wide portico a figure which, with a great bound of her heart, she believed to belong to her divorced husband, but which a moment later she decided to be that of Mr. William Haughton.

"They are going to call at Redwoode," she thought, rightly enough, but with singular resentfulness. "They must not see me, for I am going there too."

She hurried on to a gate that opened into the park of Redwoode, dismounted, opened it, and led her horse into the shadow of the trees. She next secured the gate as she had found it, remounted, and rode along a path which, she conjectured, would lead her to the mansion. She had that morning, before visiting Sea View, become partially familiar with one approach to Redwoode, having seen a woodman open the gate by which she had now entered, closing it without locking it, and had watched his progress for some little distance.

At the foot of the hill crowned by the dwelling she again dismounted, tied her horse to a tree, and made on foot the ascent, pausing now and then to rest, or to conceal herself from observation of woodmen or gardeners. She crossed the swollen brook by a marble arch, and kept on in the path until she had gained level ground and at the same time the entrance of a round marble temple, which a glance assured her to be untenanted. The mansion was visible at some little distance through the trees, but no one was within sight. Having assured herself of this fact, Margaret Sorel moved stealthily towards the door of the temple, gave another glance around, and then glided in swiftly, closed and locked the door behind her.

CHAPTER XI.

The little kiosk of which Margaret Sorel had taken temporary possession was shaped after the fashion of those that adorn Turkish gardens, and was surmounted by a glittering dome which looked like gold in the sunlight. The walls were composed of jalousie shutters, now ajar, and the fresh, perfumed air swept through the pretty little chamber without restraint.

The floor was of marble, laid in a mosaic pattern; the panels between the shutters were slender mirrors; there was a luxurious Turkish couch in the centre of the room, a few books, and an antique Turkish scent-jar, overflowing with crushed and odorous rose-petals, completed the furniture.

The woman's first act was to close all the shutters, and to secure them so that no one could look in upon her movements. The light that lingered, although dim, was sufficient for her purpose. She unlocked her travelling bag, strewed its contents over the crimson couch, and proceeded to make her toilet with an aptness and readiness unmarred by her singular and unusual surroundings. She unbound her long black hair, permitted it to flow over her shoulders without any other restraint than that afforded by a scarlet ribbon, which she bound around her brows.

From one of her toilet bottles she produced a dye, which gave to her beauty a gipsy complexion, and one of the boxes afforded her abundant carmine for her cheeks, which, under her treatment, soon glowed like twin-roses.

She then devoted her attention to her dress. Her riding-habit was exchanged for short, ample skirts, and a bright blue gown, whose hem reached only to her trim ankles. There was no need to exchange her Polish boots, for they were high and decorated with cords and tassels in profusion.

Her costume was completed by the addition of a wide scarlet cloak and a hood of the same material, from the sides of which her long black locks strayed in wild disorder.

Thus arrayed she was the perfect representation of a gipsy maid—quite as perfect as when, in the same costume and character, she had awakened the rapturous applause of crowded audiences.

She surveyed her reflection critically in her hand-mirror and the panels of the wall, startled by the fierce brightness of her eyes, and exultant in her perfect rendering of the character she had assumed.

"I shall do!" she murmured, approvingly. "Even Richard Haughton would not know me now. I must refresh my mind in my part."

She took from her travelling-bag a small worn volume, full of cabalistic signs, which she studied for some minutes intently. The book was a compilation of fortune-teller's lore, explained the signification of dreams, and taught the art of chiromancy.

It was an invaluable assistant to one wishing to impose upon the silly or ignorant; but nothing could be more unsuitable to Miss Sorel's present purpose. She, however, thought differently. She reasoned to herself that Miss Glinwick, being an East Indian, and having a Hindoo mother, must necessarily be more or less superstitious. The very air of heathen India, she thought, with its ruby-eyed idols and its gorgeous temples, must be full of superstition, and no native could fail to be infected by it.

The strange, supernatural tales to which the Asiatics love to listen for hours together, and with which Hellice was no doubt familiar, had probably made her a willing and implicit believer in the fortune-teller's pretended art.

So thinking, she prepared herself for the part she intended to play. The book was consulted once or twice, and was then returned to its concealment.

Miss Sorel glanced over the volumes belonging to the place and found them to be books of poems belonging to Lady Redwoode.

"Very good," she thought. "This is Lady Redwoode's private resort. No one will wonder to find it locked and the key gone if the discovery be made. This is better than I expected."

She thrust the travelling-bag in a corner, gave a last look at her reflection in the mirrors, and cautiously opened the door.

There was no one within sight, and she made a quick egress, locked the portal behind her, and put the key in her pocket.

She then took her way to the mansion.

Her path led along the brink of the hill, past the waterfall beside which Sir Richard Haughton had first beheld Hellice, past arbours, summer-houses, and gardens, until at length she emerged into full view of the rear of the dwelling and in sight of the servants' hall.

She was totally unfamiliar with the grounds and mansion, and had expected to reach a different entrance, but she was not dissatisfied at her mistake when a rosy-cheeked maid emerged from the house and accosted her, inquiring if she could tell fortunes.

"Aye, that can I!" replied the pretended gipsy, with a low courtesy. "Shall I tell yours, my pretty girl?"

The maid blushed at the compliment and assented. Other servants came trooping out, and the fortune-teller was surrounded and called upon for evidences of her skill in the pretended art of reading the future. Their demands were complied with. Promises of speedy marriages, unexpected receipts of sums of money, the usual letters and disappointments, were liberally dispensed to one and all, to the general satisfaction of the goodnatured and

credulous throng, and pieces of silver were showered upon the fortune-teller.

"If the young mistress could only see you!" said the girl who had first engaged Miss Sorel's attention, and whose faith was in a state of the highest activity. "An English gipsy might be a diversion to her, and I am sure she would pay you well!"

The fortune-teller drew the girl apart from the crowd and besought her to procure an interview between the young ladies and herself, offering her newly-acquired gains as a reward for the favour.

"I wish I could," sighed the girl, "but it would be as much as my place is worth. I could not even get speech with either of the young ladies, for I am only a kitchen-maid. Why, I might live here till I get grey without ever being directly spoken to by the young mistress. And I don't care to ask Mrs. Renee to take you to Miss Avon's room. Mrs. Renee is Miss Glinwick's grandmother, they say, and she's Hindoo, and has a pair of small black eyes that can read your soul; she reads the stars, she says, and would be jealous of you, I make no doubt."

Finding the maid thus communicative, Miss Sorel questioned her artfully, and was made a partaker of all the gossip abroad in the servants' hall. The rival claims of the young ladies to the position of daughter and heiress to the Baroness were not discussed, only because not known. Lady Redwoode had preserved this secret from the household, who did not dream that any uncertainty attended the recognition of Miss Cecile. But the attentions of Mr. Andrew Forsythe to the heiress were commented upon, the surpassing beauty of Hellice extolled, and the fact of a relationship between the latter and the Hindoo insisted upon.

"Well, if you won't assist me, I must seek the young ladies for myself," said the pretended gipsy, when she had extracted all the information possible. "Look out for the handsome groom, my pretty maid."

With this parting injunction, which overwhelmed the girl with delight, and which seemed greatly to encourage a bashful, good-looking groom who had been eyeing the maid askance, the fortune-teller turned away, and hastened towards the front of the mansion, determined to linger within the shade of the trees until one or other of the young ladies should venture on the lawn.

The good fortune that had been with her hitherto did not desert her now, for she had scarcely gained the desired shade when her keen eyes detected, at some distance down the avenue, a lithe, grey-robed figure, wrapped about with a fluttering Indian shawl of scarlet and gold.

She recognised the latter at once as belonging to the visitor of the ruins, and with a bold, assured step, she hurried towards her. A brisk walk of some minutes brought her close to the maiden, who was walking to and fro under the trees, enjoying with rare delight the songs of the birds, the sweetness of the air, the beautiful scenery that lay at the foot of the hill, and her glimpses of the distant sea.

Her face was as calm and as sweet as the starry night. There was no trace of storm in her bright countenance; no gloom in her dark, passionate eyes; no sadness in the expression of her delicate mouth. She seemed very happy and content, and there was an appearance of purity about her which impressed even the disguised woman who was approaching her with a heart filled with jealousy and hatred.

"Oh, this dear old England!" the pretended gipsy heard her murmur, in tones quivering with feeling: "I have dreamed of it all my life, but I never imagined half its quiet beauty and loveliness."

Her eyes roamed over the beautiful scene, dwelling upon vine-draped cottages, shining brooks, green fields, emerald meadows, the distant ruins at Sea View, looking hoary with age, and, beyond all, the great bright sea.

It was not to be wondered at that the heart of the maiden was touched by the sight of a

peaceful beauty of which she had all her life dreamed, and which she saw now with eyes used only to wilder scenes beneath a tropical sky.

Absorbed in contemplation, she did not observe her enemy's approach, until she was suddenly startled by a footfall at her side.

Looking up quickly, her gaze rested upon the pretended gipsy.

She regarded her a moment as if she had been a feature of the scenery, and then would have turned away, but that her enemy detained her by a gesture, saying—

"Pretty lady, shall I tell your fortune? Would you know to what end you have crossed the wide sea? Cross the gipsy's hand with silver and the future shall be made plain to you."

"I do not believe in fortune-telling," replied Hellice, simply. "I do not wish to know my future, but there is money for you," and she drew from her tiny embroidered purse a silver coin and tendered it to the woman.

The fortune-teller took it and came still nearer.

"I am no impostor, gentle lady," she asserted. "You need not believe what I shall tell you, but listen to me, I entreat you."

Hellice hesitated, then complied with the woman's importunities with a smile.

As she had said, she was entirely destitute of faith in the power of any person to read the future better than another, but she was willing to be amused and to become acquainted with the manners of the English gipsy, she having encountered many of the nomadic race in her native country.

She extended her small, slender hand, with its tapering fingers, and her enemy clasped it with something like fierceness, and pretended to read the delicate lines crossing the pink palm.

"You were born in a distant country," said Margaret Sorel, speaking with assumed gentleness, yet feeling a desire to crush that pretty hand with her own larger and stronger one. "You are but partly of English descent. One of your parents was a native Hindoo, and you have inherited many of her traits."

Hellice half snatched away her hand, a quick flush mounted to her cheeks, and she would have uttered an exclamation but for the remembrance that it was only a gipsy who was speaking.

It was evident that she did not feel flattered at the communication she had received, but a scornful smile curved her lips at her own momentary folly in resenting it.

"Well, go on!" she said, quietly.

"You do not like me to say that you are part Hindoo," declared the fortune-teller, eyeing her keenly. "Have you deemed otherwise?"

Hellice grew pale, but her voice and manner were full of haughtiness as she responded,—

"How can it matter to a stranger what I may have thought? I will go in—"

"Pardon the poor gipsy, gentle lady. I meant not to offend. Shall I talk to you of love? I read in your face that you are just learning the sweet lesson, but I bid you beware. The man you love is not free to wed. Be warned in time and avoid him, or a dreadful doom will be yours!"

Hellice withdrew her hand from the woman's grasp, half alarmed at her menacing tone and the fierce glitter of her eyes.

"I repeat it—he is not free to wed!" cried the divorced wife, vehemently. "A marriage between you and him can never take place. He told to him, avoid him, hate him—do anything but love him and smile upon him. In a love for him lies your life-long misery and desolation!"

Hellice retreated a step, impressed with the idea that the woman before her was a lunatic.

The sweet feelings at her heart, the existence of which she had not suspected, were shocked into premature being.

She was deathly pale, her eyes glowed with a strange kind of luminousness, and her heart throbbed.

At this juncture the ring of horses' hoofs was heard in the avenue almost at hand. The pretended gipsy and her intended victim had been too much absorbed to hear the closing of the gates, and this sound was their first intimation of an approach.

Hellice looked up, uttered a joyful exclamation, and sprang towards the foremost rider, who checked his steed at sight of her and leaped to the ground.

As may be guessed, the rider was Sir Richard Haughton.

His proud, calm face became radiant at sight of the East Indian girl, and his eyes beamed with a strangely tender expression as he marked that her attitude was that of desiring protection. As for Hellice, her countenance was irradiated by a lovely bloom, and her expression of alarm changed to one of security.

Both, after a glance at each other, in which soul spoke to soul, turned their gaze upon the fortune-teller.

Strong in the belief that her disguise would defy even the penetration of her former husband, the divorced wife stood her ground. With a quick movement she drew forward her flowing locks to shade her face, and then folded her hands upon her breast. She did not look up openly, but watched Sir Richard with a furtive, stealthy gaze.

"I fancied you were alarmed, Miss Glintwick!" said Sir Richard, somewhat puzzled.

"I believe I was foolishly so," replied Hellice, blushing. "I am not used to English gipsies, and this one frightened me. I dare say the poor woman would not willingly have alarmed me."

"But what could she have said to frighten you, Miss Glintwick?" inquired the young Baronet. "Was she attempting to extort money?"

Hellice replied in the negative, and looked so embarrassed and confused that Sir Richard's keen perception warned him that he had been the subject of the gipsy's remarks. He looked again at the latter, then his face darkened and his brows grew stern.

He had recognized his divorced wife, notwithstanding her disguise.

For a moment he was chilled to the heart with apprehension as to what she might have said. Perhaps she had declared herself his wife—perhaps had told the story of their marriage with untruthful colouring—perhaps she had represented him as unfaithful, and herself as a wronged yet loving wife. A cold perspiration broke out upon his pale forehead, and in that moment of anguish he knew that he loved Hellice Glintwick already as he had never loved before, and as he would never cease to love—with all the ardour of a proud, strong nature and a passionate soul.

He looked at Hellice for confirmation of his suspicion, almost expecting to find her gaze intentionally averted; but her clear, truthful eyes, like wells of burning sunshine, met his as frankly as before, and her cheeks glowed faintly like a lamp shining through a thin porcelain shade.

There was no aversion, no contempt, no suspicion in her glance, and at once his heart grew light under the conviction that he had come in time to interrupt a communication that might have been fatal to his hopes.

"You must not heed the idle words of a wandering gipsy, Miss Glintwick," he said, in his usual tones, as the maiden remained silent. "The gipsy's trade is to obtain money by working on the fears of the young and trusting, but I am sure you have no faith in her random guesses!"

"None whatever!" declared Hellice, smiling. "It was not what she said, but her manner that startled me."

At this moment Mr. William Haughton, who had remained in the background, gazing at the young girl in speechless admiration, approached his nephew and plucked his coat-sleeve, demanding in an audible whisper an introduction to Miss Glintwick.

Sir Richard complied with the request, and Hellice acknowledged her new acquaintance by

a bow and a smile that transported him to the seventh heaven of delight. He quitted his horse, stationed himself at her side, and began to lavish compliments upon her that seemed to her irresistibly amusing.

"I fancied you name was Miss Avon," he said, "but 'what's in a name?' 'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.' Permit me to congratulate you upon your restoration to your charming mother. Lady Redwoode is one of my few and chosen friends. Her lovely person enshrines a lovely soul!"

"Lady Redwoode is indeed lovely," replied Hellice, sadly and abstractedly. "But you are mistaken in my relationship to her, Mr. Haughton. I should have been happy beyond all power of expression to have been claimed as her child, but that happiness was reserved for another."

Mr. Haughton looked at her with a vague expression, not comprehending her; but, suddenly concluding that "it was all right," his brow cleared and he proceeded to inquire how she liked the land of her ancestors.

Hellice replied with the enthusiasm peculiar to her character, and while she was so engaged Sir Richard moved towards the pretended gipsy, who maintained her position, feeling secure in her disguise, in order to watch the intercourse of the man she loved with the woman she now hated.

She was watching Hellice with an angry, envious look when the young Baronet whispered at her ear,—

"I know you, Margaret Sorel! Wretched woman, how dare you pollute the ears of this pure and innocent girl with your foul tongue? Away, if you would not be committed to gaol as a trespasser and a vagrant!"

The divorced wife reeled as if she had been struck.

"Richard!" she gasped.

He answered only by the one word,—

"Go!"

"Richard!" she said again, in a fierce, agonised whisper, looking at him imploringly, "what is this girl to you? You have mourned me all these years, and now a childish creature like that has come between us! I cannot bear it, I will not bear it! Forgive me and take me back, or cast me off at your peril. I tell you I am no meek, pining girl to sit down and weep for your loss, but a bitter, resolute woman able to avenge herself upon you and upon her!" and she pointed towards the unconscious Hellice.

The young Baronet replied only by pointing towards the lodge gate.

The divorced wife breathed hard and pressed her hands upon her heart to still its frenzied throbbings.

"You order me from your presence as unfit to speak to her," she said, in the same low, intense tone. "Take heed, Richard Haughton, lest I keep my vow and rob you of her in the moment you think to call her your own. No woman but I shall ever be your wife. Since you reject my love, bear the burden of my hate! I will have revenge—revenge on you and on her!"

With a wild, strange, eldritch laugh that chilled the blood of those who heard it, and

Dean Farrar on Marriage

A charming article on this subject forms a delightful introduction to a handbook, entitled "Marriage, Weddings, and the Home," which is absolutely invaluable to all who are contemplating matrimony. This book will prove a very acceptable present to all engaged couples. A Purchaser at Nottingham says: "From a very cursory inspection I should imagine it to be a most useful book." It explains every point in regard to etiquette, offers suggestions as to where to spend the honeymoon, there is a chapter in regard to furnishing, etc., and the 1/6 which it costs is a marvellously good investment.—Send Stamps or Postal Order to-day to F. W. SEARS, 7, OXFORD CHURCH, LUTON, Herts, ENGLAND.

with a menacing look at her former husband, so dark and deadly in its import that he involuntarily shuddered, Margaret Sorel dashed away through the shadows of the trees, her scarlet cloak floating out behind her like a blood-dyed banner.

Sir Richard became slightly pale, but, as calm and quiet as ever, joined Hellice, who had turned round at the sound of that weird laughter, and smiled reassuringly.

"This was an unpleasant encounter for you, Miss Glintwick," he said, quietly, "but I do not think that woman will dare molest you again!"

"I think she is crazy," remarked Mr. Haughton, whose theory it was that every person was a lunatic whose actions were at all singular, but who, strangely enough, never classed himself among the mentally afflicted. "Do not be alarmed, Miss Glintwick. I will protect you," and he smiled benignantly upon her.

Hellice thanked him, and a gardener coming up, the horses were delivered into his guardianship while the trio advanced slowly towards the mansion. Sir Richard walked close beside the maiden, his heart burning with the sweet and generous passion of youth, and his fair face glowing with a sweet, ineffable tenderness, as he bent towards Hellice, and the young East India walked shyly beside him, her dark loveliness made glorious by the sweet and tender thoughts that brooded at her heart. Neither spoke much, being wrapped in vague, delicious reveries over the discovery which Margaret Sorel had forced upon both that their hearts were no longer without an object about which to entwine the fairest hopes and upon which to lavish a wealth of affection.

But while Hellice's discovery was but half acknowledged to herself, as became a shy and modest maiden, Sir Richard's contributed to strengthen the great purpose he had formed of wooing and winning her to be all his own.

CHAPTER XII.

Cecile raised herself upon her arm and looked intently into the face of her ayah as the latter bent towards her, without changing her kneeling position. That face, brown and ruddy in its Asiatic beauty, was instinct with a deadly meaning. The small black eyes glittered like those of a serpent, and there was a cruel smile on her lips—a smile utterly devoid of mirth, but full of a strange and subtle wickedness that would have made any other than Cecile recoil in fear and aversion.

But the chosen heiress of Redwoode regarded her attendant with a pleased and trusting look, and took between her white fingers her brown hand, and caressed it as a child might have played with a sleeping tigress.

"Dear Renee," she murmured softly "you would do anything for me, would you not?"

"Anything, my sweet!" cried the Hindoo, with impetuosity, kissing fiercely the maiden's hand. "No lover can be truer to his mistress than I to thee, blue-eyed daughter of the sun. Command me, Cecile, and I will obey. Shall the lady of Redwoode fade away and leave you heiress of all her possessions?" and her voice was low and terrible, and her eyes glittered with a deadlier light. "Shall Hellice be swept from your path like an autumn leaf before the wind? Speak, command, my darling, that I may prove to you my love and fidelity."

Cecile's mouth, that seemed formed for tender utterances, reflected the wicked smile of the Hindoo. Her blue eyes which her fond mother had compared to dewy violets, grew hard and triumphant in expression, and the character of her countenance changed to one that was utterly revolting. It seemed as though her mask of loveliness had fallen aside and revealed a hideously deformed soul. She continued to play with the ayah's hand, as if she exulted in her complete supremacy over that perverted nature, and as one who plays with a leashed bloodhound.

"I see I could not ask too much of you, Renee," she said, absently.

"Try me and see," returned the ayah. "You have never asked anything of me in vain as yet. Your life has been a bed of roses, my sweet. No one has ever dared to frown upon you or speak harshly to you. People have fawned upon you from your birth."

"All but Hellice," said Cecile, discontentedly.

"All but Hellice," repeated the Hindoo, compressing her lips. "Your cousin has always been strange and peculiar. She would not tell a falsehood to save her life, I do believe," and her tone grew contemptuous. "She would be a saint, I suppose. Is it of her you would speak, Cecile? Do you fear her?"

"Yes, I fear her—that is the word!" cried Cecile. "Oh, Renee, you have not noticed as I have done that Lady Redwoode is undecided and wavering between Hellice and me. She wants to make us co-heiresses, and I smiled and acceded to the wish when my heart was full of bitterness and anger. And when my head has lain on her bosom, Renee, and I have looked up into her face, it has worn an absent, anxious expression, and I knew she was thinking of Hellice. This very morning, at the breakfast table, I uttered some idle, pretty compliments to mamma; she smiled and thanked me, and then turned her eyes upon Hellice, who sat silent and thoughtful, and I fancied my mother's gaze was one of anxious questioning."

"Perhaps it was," said the ayah, moodily. "But it must not be so," exclaimed Cecile, in alarm. "What if she were to adopt Hellice as her daughter? What if she were to settle her private fortune upon her? What if, indeed, she were to take her in my place? I tell you, Renee, that Hellice with her proud silence and grave demeanour is making an impression upon Lady Redwoode's heart which I may not be able to efface. This must not go on. You must help me, Renee."

OUR NEW YEAR PRESENTS

We do not care to spend a lot of money over advertising the "LONDON READER" in the newspapers. We would far rather give the money to our readers, because we are certain that they will advertise us much better than the papers would. We have been giving away all sorts of presents month after month, and we are now going to eclipse all our former efforts.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO

If you want to receive one of these lovely Gold Pattern **SOVEREIGN PURSES**, Fashionable Gold Design **NECKLETS**, Massive Gold Pattern **CURB BRACELETS**, or Plated **SALT CELLARS**, with gilt lining, we will tell you what you have to do. There is no puzzle to be solved, but



the only condition is that you send us Sixpence for which ever of these lovely pieces of jewellery you like, together with a penny for postage, and if the goods are not sold out we will send to you, but if they are all gone we will return your money. Look at these illustrations and ask yourself if you ever heard of such a grand offer as we have made.

WRITE AT ONCE

Everyone is simply delighted with the extraordinary value they are getting. Don't miss this chance of a life-time. The offer will close on December 31st; but we shall very quickly be sold out now.

PUZZLE EDITOR,

"London Reader,"

50 & 52, Ludgate Hill,
London.



"How!" questioned the Hindoo, in the soft accents of her native tongue.

"I know not how," answered Cecile, in the same language. "But one end is to be obtained. Lady Redwoods must be induced to look coldly upon Hellice. She must despise and dislike her. She must give her a home only from a sense of duty. Can you bring this about?"

"I have not the Baroness's ear in which to whisper things against Hellice," replied the ayah, thoughtfully. "It is for you to poison the mind of Lady Redwoods against your cousin. Your heart has not grown weak, has it, my pet? nor is your skill in making people believe incredible things lost."

"I hope not, but I do not wish to betray myself as Hellice's enemy. Yet I will use all my influence with mamma against Hellice. Oh, Renee, I wish I had my cousin's beauty instead of this pink and white prettiness of mine. Lady Redwoods said this morning that Hellice was far more beautiful than I. It has always been so. Strangers always prefer her to me, and I must remain in the background as a foil to her beauty. I will not submit to a position second to my cousin's in any respect."

"Nor need you," said the ayah. "If insinuations and falsehoods fail to rid you of Hellice, there remains another resource."

"And that?" questioned Cecile, her face paling.

The Hindoo touched her breast significantly. Cecile cast a fearful glance around her, and then looked eagerly into the brown face, whose expression had grown even more terrible in its wicked meaning, and whispered in the ayah's native tongue.

"You mean that box of powders and waters? You have it safe, Renee? Show it me!"

The Hindoo loosened from beneath the neck of her dress a heavy gold chain of considerable length. At its extremity, cleverly concealed beneath her ample bosom, was a small, curiously wrought box of gold, remarkable for its elaborate workmanship and for the four small but liquid rubies set in its corners. A tiny gold key depended also from the chain, and with its aid Renee unlocked the shining box. She then raised the lid.

Its contents consisted simply of half-a-dozen crystal phials, fitted with glass stoppers under close-fitting caps of chased gold. The tiny phials were filled, three with clear and colourless liquids, as limpid as water, and the remaining three with powders, the contents of two being as white as freshly gathered snow, and the third of a deep sea-green hue, resembling a powdered emerald.

"Are they not beautiful?" asked Renee, in a tone of ardent admiration, as she held up alternately the phials to the light. "This is a perfume, Cecile, that soothes the inhaler to a delicious sleep from which there is no awakening at midnight, when the moon was at the full, grow in rank marshes in India, guarded by venomous serpents. This," and she exhibited the next, "grew in a serpent's fangs; and this," taking up a third, "produces a wasting away that cannot be told from consumption. But I need not explain their separate properties to you. When you have need of me you have but to speak."

"I may have need of those things sooner than you dream," said Cecile, gloomily, yet not without a shudder, as she looked upon the dangerous weapons at her control. "I will wait till other means fail. Put them away, Renee. I only desired to know that they were safe."

The Hindoo obeyed, concealing her deadly treasure in her bosom, and fastening above it her small red shawl, while Cecile sank back upon her pillow and regarded her hands complacently, holding them up as the ayah had displayed the phials.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No 2013. Back numbers can be obtained through any News-agent.)

A Prisoner for Seventeen Years.

An interesting event has just been reported by a *Liverpool Courier* representative. For seventeen years Mrs. Elizabeth McNulty, of 40, Price Street, Birkenhead, has been a martyr to a disease which caused her to be practically cut off from the outside world. Pronounced incurable, this poor derelict of humanity abandoned all hope, and resigned herself to the worst. But a kindly providence smiled at last upon her and brought Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness to her notice. She tried them, with the result that, in spite of the gloomy view of her case by eminent medical men, and operations undergone to no purpose, Mrs. McNulty is now perfectly cured, and is daily receiving the congratulations of a dumb-founded neighbourhood.

This is the wonderful story as detailed by her to a *Courier* reporter:—

"I had enjoyed as good health as anyone could desire until about seventeen years ago, when after attending upon a neighbour's little girl who was down with scarlet fever I contracted the disease myself. In a matter of seven weeks I recovered, but remained for several months in so weak a state that I could scarcely walk across the floor. I was racked with fearful pains in the head: so bad were they at times that I could hardly see. After nine months' suffering I saw a doctor, but he did not effect any good. I then lost my appetite, and anything I ate seemed to make my head worse."

"At last I became so bad that I could eat no solid food; I had to drink new milk to keep myself alive, and even taking this gave me a pain between my shoulders which was for all the world like a knife scraping the bone."

"Then a new development appeared. A fearful rash broke out all over my face. I took every kind of medicine to clear my blood, but they only had the effect of making me worse. What with the agony I was suffering, the other complaints, and then this dreadful rash, my cup of bitterness was indeed full to overflowing! The rash on my face was so bad that I was ashamed to venture out of my house. It kept me a prisoner within doors."

"After trying more medicines and visiting several doctors, I went to the Skin Hospital in Liverpool. There I was examined by many doctors, and underwent a painful operation; but when they told me at length that I should have to have my nose scraped, I was frightened, and I never went again."

"After a number of years of this terrible suffering, I commenced to have a succession of week-end bilious attacks with remarkable regularity. I can safely say that, for upwards of two years, I never knew what it was to be without a bilious attack on Sunday, which prostrated me for the whole day."

"One day (it was a Wednesday), on coming down stairs, I found a little book under the door, telling of the wonderful cures which had been effected by Charles Forde's Bile Beans. I procured a box, and took one of the beans before I went to bed that night. The next morning my head did not feel so heavy, so I continued taking the Beans, and began to feel better and stronger every day. One Sunday when it came to be my usual time to be prostrated with biliousness, I got the dinner ready and sat down and ate a hearty meal, without the least sign of any illness!"

"My husband said, 'What is the matter with you to-day? Are you not going to be ill?' Then I told him how I had taken the Bile Beans, and as soon as he saw that they had had such a wonderful effect on me, he sent out for another box. By degrees the rash and spots began to disappear from my face, until I had as clear a complexion as anyone could desire. Above all, I became blessed with a splendid appetite."

"People cannot realise that such a wonderful change has been wrought in me so quickly, and all my neighbours, who knew how I suffered, say it is the most miraculous thing they have ever seen."

"I feel now as though I don't know my own strength, and am as well and hearty as I was when I was a girl of fourteen. Well, that"—pointing to a huge basket full of clothes which she had just washed—"is evidence that I am strong enough. For the last four months I have had from seven to ten dozen clothes, and sometimes more, every week, and I have washed them all myself. What is more, I have felt nothing worse at the end of the day than a natural tired feeling, which a night's sound sleep has removed. There is nothing in which I have greater faith than Bile Beans, and I am sure, now that you have heard my story, you will readily understand that."

THE STAGE VILLAIN.

Under the painted canvas tree
The wicked villain stands,
With blue-black whiskers on his face
In coarse and shining strands,
And gleaming daggers tensely held
In both his sinewy hands.

His record's bad and black and long,
He's "wanted" everywhere;
Detectives crack are on his track,
Yet never find his lair,
Until, just as the curtain falls,
They land on him for fair.

Act in, act out, he maims and slays
And lies and robs and steals;
He sneaks along with dagger drawn
Behind the hero's heels,
And yet no crime, however foul,
His purpose dark reveals.

The children coming home from school
(A millionaire's, of course)
He gags and binds and carries off
Upon a charging horse,
And though they howl and plead and wail
He never shows remorse.

In fact, he says but little, save
When some deep plan is spoiled,
When some bold hero lands the girl
For whom the villain's toiled;
He growls between his close-clinked teeth
In awful accents, "E-f-f-f-foiled!"

He goes on Sunday to the church,
And prays both loud and long,
And lifts his large and deep bass voice
In spiritual song;
For playing the church-member dodge
Is where he must be strong.

Killing, destroying, embezzling
Through every act he goes;
Each moment sees some new-formed plan
To add to human woes;
Something attempted, something done,
Has foiled his many foes.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
No longer will we lack
The means to trace a villain down
And catch him in his track,
We'll straight pursue all deep-voiced men
Whose whiskers are blue-black!

HIS WANTS WERE FEW.—Tramp: "Please, mum, would yer be as kind as to let me have a needle and thread? Mrs. Suburb: "Well, y-e-s, I can let you have that?" "Thankee, mum. Now, you'd oblige me very much if you'll let me have a bit of cloth for a patch." "Well, here is some." "Thankee, mum; but it's a different color from my travellin' suit. Perhaps, mum, you could spare me some of your husband's old clothes that this patch will match." "Well, I declare! I'll give you an old suit, however. Here it is." "Thankee, mum. I see it's a little large, mum; but if you'll kindly furnish me with a square meal, mebbly I can fill it out."

Facetiæ

HE WASN'T FULL.—Miss Pretty: "Isn't Mr. Finemann thoughtful?" Mr. Finemann's Rival: "Yes, he's thought full by a good many here, but I guess that idiotic way of his is natural."

APPRECIATED.—Bliffers: "How do you excuse those mother-in-law jokes to your wife?" Fanniman: "I tell her they refer to her mother-in-law, and she says they are not half bad enough."

RATHER FORWARD.—Clara: "That Gussie Gash ought to be ashamed of herself, the bold thing!" Dora: "What did she do?" Clara: "She's accepted Jack Jewel, and he hadn't proposed to her but three times."

THEY COME HIGH BUT.—Mrs. Makeshift: "Well, I've found out how to make up my new dress at last." Mr. M.: "Then why don't you get the stuff?" Mrs. M.: "No money left. It took all I had to buy the fashion papers."

MORE TYRANNY.—Mr. De Avnoo: "I see that calling has gone out of fashion." Mrs. De Avnoo: "Yes; it had to. Servants have become too tyrannical." "Tyrannical?" "Indeed they are. One-half of them deliberately refuse to lie to undesirable visitors."

WORK VENUS PLEASURE.—Landseman: "You say that handsome craft is a fishing boat. How can you distinguish such a beautiful vessel from a pleasure yacht?" Boatman: "Easy 'nough. A pleasure craft always has sail enough to upset 'er, and ballast enough to sink 'er."

IT PAYS TO BE LIBERAL.—Mrs. Slimdiet: "Put plenty of butter on the table." New Girl (who has worked in boarding-houses before): "Half a pound, mum?" Mrs. Slimdiet: "Two or three pounds. If there isn't enough to smell, they may take some."

JUSTIFIABLE, PERHAPS.—Excited Citizen: "I want a man arrested right away! I've been assaulted, and I wasn't doing a thing but walking along the street in a quiet, orderly and inoffensive manner, and whistling." Justice: "Um—er—what tune were you whistling?"

SAFETY ASSURED.—Old Lady: "Oh, I always get so nervous on a railroad. Don't you think we're goin' at an awful rate?" Mr. Illuck: "Y-e-s, but you needn't worry, mum; there won't be any accident." "How do you know there won't?" "Cause I've got an accident insurance ticket."

A NOBLE AMBITION.—Cholly: "I am tired of letting paw support me, and I've made up my mind to become independent of him, don't you know?" Miss Bullion: "I think that's a very noble ambition. Cholly: "Yaas. I've determined to settle down and marry some nice rich girl like you, don't you know?"

MONEY SAVED, MONEY EARNED.—Mrs. Climber: "My dear, Mrs. Highup has had her portrait painted by a celebrated artist, and I haven't a thing but common, ordinary, everyday photographs to show." Husband (a wise man): "Huh! The idea of advertising to the whole world that her complexion is so bad it won't stand the camera!"

THE ADVANTAGE OF EDUCATION.—"Eddication is a good thing, Lumpy, an' don't you run it down." "Ever get any of it, Weary?" "Me? Well, I should say yes. I went to night school all one winter." "An' what did you get to show for it, Weary?" "What did I get? I got four overcoats, three hats, and seven umbrellas. Don't you tell me that goin' to school is a waste o' time!"

AN OBSERVANT FATHER.—"That young man of yours," said the observing parent, as his daughter came down to breakfast, "should apply for a job in a curiosity show." "Why, father," exclaimed the young lady, in tones of indignation, "what do you mean?" "I noticed when I passed through the hall late last night," answered the old man, "that he had two heads upon his shoulders."

A COMFORTABLE SEAT.—"Was he on his knees when he proposed to you?" "No; I was!"

ANOTHER LIE NAILED.—Dora: "The papers say you are to marry Lord Topnott." Clara: "It's a base slander. I'm only engaged to him."

UTTERLY UNSELFISH.—Mother: "Do you think his love for you is unselfish?" Daughter: "Perfectly. The other night he let me sit so long on his knee that he walked lame for ten minutes."

HONOURS EASY.—German Student: "I know dese scars my face on look not pretty, but I proud of them am. I get them in duels." American Student: "Hah! Wait-till you see some of our football champions!"

A GOOD TEST.—Bishop: "How are you succeeding here?" Struggling Pastor: "The standard of morality is rising gradually." "I am glad to hear that." "Yes, I am no longer obliged to demand cash in advance."

LUXURES OF LIFE.—Mrs. Upton: "You will have to increase my allowance for servants' wages, my dear." Mr. Upton: "What for?" Mrs. Upton: "Our butler wants a valet, and my waiting maid wants a waiting maid."

SURE TO COME.—Jack: "So George has married Dora, eh? Look out for a divorce." Dick: "You don't mean it!" Jack: "Sure to come. It is one of those matches in which the relatives on both sides are perfectly satisfied."

A DESIRABLE NEIGHBOUR.—Mrs. Binks: "That woman we just passed is the nicest neighbour I ever had." Friend: "Neighbour? Why, she didn't so much as glance at you." Mrs. Binks: "That's what I like about her."

NO USE FOR SUCH A PRIZE.—Goodheart: "I've got you down for a couple of tickets; we're getting up a raffle for a poor man of our neighbourhood." Jockley: "None for me, thank you. I wouldn't know what to do with a poor man if I won him."

SURE TO BE A GO.—Modern Composer: "I've got a new stage song that's bound to make a hit." Manager: "Any sense in it?" "None at all." "Any fun in it?" "Not a bit." "Any music in it?" "Not a note." "Whoop! We'll take the town!"

CONVENIENT HUSBANDS.—Hairdresser: "What kind of a man should a Society woman marry?" Philosopher: "A newspaper man, by all means." "Dear me! Why?" "Because he'll never be at home enough to know that you are always away from home."

A CLEANSING REMEDY.—Doctor: "There's nothing serious the matter with Michael, Mrs. Muldoon. I think a little soap and water will do him as much good as anything." Mrs. Muldoon: "Yis, doctor; an' will Oi give it t' him befoor or after his meals?"

SKIPPED WITH THE COACHMAN.—"They have a new coachman at the Rippenbangers." "What's the matter with the old one?" "He let the horses run away." "Did they run far?" "Clear out into the suburbs." "Anybody with him?" "Yes; Mamie Rippenbanger. She and the coachman haven't got back yet."

A MODERN NIMROD.—Jimson: "Where are you going?" Billson: "Only off for a day's shooting." Jimson: "Great snakes! With that cartload of freight?" Billson: "Those boxes contain books, the latest and most complete compendiums of the game laws of the Kingdom. I don't want to shoot anything out of season."

TO GLADDEN FOUR HEARTS.—Aunt Dinah: "Major, if yo' cnd gimme an old paih breeches yo'll make foash heastie glad." Major Julep: "Four, aunty?" Aunt Dinah: "Yess, sah. De ol' man will weah dem fur a while, en gib dem to Jim. Den Jim will gib dem to Pete, en after Pete weahs dem fur a while he'll put dem on de mule to keep de flies off his hind legs."

Statistics

IN 1870 the Government bought up the telegraphic companies for £7,900,000. There were then not more than 6,000,000 messages a year; now there are nearly 90,000,000. In 1871-2 the number of messages totalled 10,000,000, but in 1896-7 they had amounted to nearly 80,000,000. The wire mileages in the former year were reckoned at 95,000,000, and in the latter year at 280,000,000.

DESPITE the war, it is satisfactory to learn that our trade with South Africa has more than recovered from the depression from which it had suffered since the outbreak of hostilities. The exports for the first nine months of the year 1901 show an increase of £2,550,900 over the corresponding period of 1900. Although this increase is indirectly due to the presence of the Army in South Africa, it is well, perhaps, to make it clear that this large volume of business consists exclusively of civilian merchandise.

GERMANY'S exports to South Africa during the past year amount to the value of £701,300, as against £1,156,200 in 1899, the shrinkage amounting to £454,900. It is interesting to note that a significant feature of this decrease is that £139,950, or nearly one-third, stands for explosives and weapons.

Gems

DON'T allow people to tell you evil or unpleasant stories. When you accept the keeping of a dangerous secret you become responsible for some of its consequences, though others are also entrusted with it.

NO success is worthy of the name unless it is won by honest industry and a brave breasting of the waves of fortune.

GENIUS at first is little more than a great capacity for receiving discipline.

SIXTEEN friends are angels sent on errands full of love.

WE are as often duped by diffidence as by confidence.

VANITY sometimes spoils a multitude of real virtues.

"HE CROWNETH THE YEAR WITH HIS GOODNESS."

"He crowneth the year with His goodness!" the grain

Crowded storehouse and bin:
The fruit, fully ripened, lies blushing, the cattle

Are safe gathered in.
While chill are the days of November, with skies

That are sombre and drear,
Wide, wide o'er the land He bestoweth His bountiful

Kindness and cheer.

"He crowneth the year with His goodness!" far, far

O'er land and o'er main,
With longing the wayfarer pilgrim shall turn
To the homestead again.

Joy! joy! to the happy home-coming, where loved ones

Await his return:
The table with dainties is crowded, and festal fires

Merrily burn.

"He crowneth the year with His goodness!" our Father

A song we would raise,
A tribute of love and thanksgiving, a psalm

Of jubilant praise;
For health, peace, and life, with its blessings, the care

That hath guarded our ways;
And, oh! for Thine own loving favour, the goodness

That crowneth our days.

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

This issue of the LONDON READER is published on the Eve of Christmas, and the Editor takes the opportunity of wishing all readers, young and old, a right down Merry Christmas and a Bright and Happy New Year.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—(1) I cannot understand why you should have had a difficulty with your spoons, and can only suggest washing them in Hudson's soap and then clean them with plate powder. (2) I do not know any particular place where you can obtain arches for boots, but I should say that any large boot-shop in your neighbourhood would keep them.

TORST.—For practical purposes, especially if the hair is to be curled or waved daily, a simpler preparation than the curling fluid you name is advisable. This may be obtained by mixing ten or twelve grains of carbonate of potash with a pint or more of warm water and soap. Froth the water by briskly stirring, and moisten the hair with it, then curl up the hair on rollers in the usual way.

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CONSTANT READER.—As far as I know, there is nothing to prevent your leaving your half-pay to your sweetheart if you wish to do so. The only thing I suggest is that you arrange with the authorities before leaving England.

GEORGE.—The term "blue-stocking," as applied to ladies devoted to or interested in literature, originated in England in 1750. A society of literary people of that period had among its members a gentleman named Stillingfleet, who always wore blue hose. He was quite regular in his attendance, and took a conspicuous part in the debates; but whenever he chanced to be absent it was a common remark that "We can do nothing without old Blue Stockings." Gradually all the members came to be known as "blue stockings," and especially the ladies who belonged to the coterie.

HELLION.—Ammonia is an invaluable household requisite; the following are only a few of its uses. Added to a bath it has a delightfully cleansing and invigorating effect on the skin. It should be added to the water until its presence can just be recognised by smell or taste. To clean hair brushes, after combing out any hair, dip the bristles—not the wood or ivory—in half a basin of tepid water to which a tablespoonful or more of ammonia has been added; keep the bristles immersed for a minute or two, fling out the liquid from the bristles and repeat the process several times, rinse in fresh water, and dry first with a towel and then by exposure to the air. For washing clothes it should be diluted as for the bath. It is not injurious like soda, and it prevents the liability of flannels and blankets to shrink. It will remove the greasy stain on the collar of coats, and renovate black silk and cloth. For these purposes it should be slightly diluted so as to mitigate the pungency which might be troublesome while using it, and then well rubbed on with a bit of flannel. It is also a specific in the treatment of the stings of wasps and other insects. It is applied to the part with the finger.

REDRUTH.—An easy mixture to make, and a very nice one, is half an ounce of lavender flowers, and half a teaspoonful of powdered cloves.

TOILETTE.—Usually mud-stains will come off silk by rubbing with a piece of flannel. If this is not efficacious, rub with a piece of linen soaked in spirits.

ANDREW.—A red nose arises from various causes, and only a physician, after close questioning as to your habits, your food, etc., would be able to give a remedy.

MOTHS.—Use alum to keep moths away. Wash over all boxes that are to be put aside with alum water, and sprinkle powdered alum wherever you think moths might appear. Another preservative is whole black pepper laid amongst the things to be protected.

E. M. B.—I would advise you to use the following lotion for your hair, which is an excellent tonic, and will, if persevered with, strengthen the hair and increase its growth:—Tincture of nux. vomica, one drachm; distilled vinegar, two and a-half ounces; tincture of capsicum, one drachm; tincture of cantharides, six drachms; spirit of rosemary, one ounce; glycerine, half an ounce; rosewater, seven and a half ounces. An occasional application is useless; it should be applied every night without fail.

Mrs. MARAH.—1lb. flour, 1lb. butter, 1lb. sugar, 1lb. peel, 1lb. raisins, 1lb. currants, 1 teaspoonful of cinnamon, a few chopped almonds, 2 eggs, 1 pint milk, 1 teaspoonful of carbonate of soda. Dry and sift the flour, rub in the butter till like sand, then add the sugar, peel cut in slices, raisins stoned, currants washed and dried, cinnamon and chopped almonds, and break the two eggs in, and mix all well. Dissolve the soda in the half-pint of milk and add to the other, mixing the whole together, then bake at once in a buttered tin; the oven rather hot at first, and cooler gradually. The cake will be done in five or six hours.

SCOTCH LASSIE.—A good emollient for a harsh skin, especially in winter time, is thus prepared:—Myrrh, half an ounce; refined honey, two ounces; refined white wax, one ounce; rose-water, one and a-half ounce; and almond oil, one and a-half ounce. Put the wax, rose-water, oil, and honey together in a jar, place this jar in a pan of boiling water and melt the contents of the inner vessel thus—over a slow fire. When the ingredients are well melted, add the myrrh, mix the whole well, and let it cool. Rub a little well into the skin at night and wipe off any surface grease with a soft cloth. It is well to bathe the hands and face with warm water before applying the cream.

UNSETTLED ONE.—It seems to me that your place is at home, especially now that your sister is about to leave it for a home of her own. Of course, I sympathise with you in not being able to "hit it," as you term it, with your other sister, but I really think you should try to live amicably together for your mother's sake. You see, if you left home you could only go into service, or into a shop, and I do not think you would like either of these things. You would find the life very much harder than living at home, where you are practically your own mistress, and are free to come and go at will. I quite understand your feeling in regard to the favourite sister—the parting will be terribly hard for you, and the loneliness afterwards almost greater than you can bear, but believe me, dear girl, it would be much harder to bear if you were with strangers, earning your daily bread—at the beck and call of others. No, I do not advise you to leave home as long as there is a place there for you to fill, and especially as your father does not wish you to go. Make up your mind to "give and take," and let there be two bears in the home, "bear" and "forbear," and by-and-by you will be writing to tell me that you are much happier, and are glad that you remained under your mother's wing.

ERIGUNTIN.—(1) A lady would rise when a gentleman visitor entered the drawing-room if she were the hostess, not otherwise. (2) As an act of courtesy a guest should rise from her seat when her host comes forward to shake hands with her, but it is not a breach of etiquette if she receives him seated.

CARPUS.—Rubbing the stone steps well with ashlar should remove all the marks; failing this, try the following method:—Take two parts of common soda, one part of powdered pumice-stone, and one part of whitening. Sift through a fine sieve, and mix with water to a paste. Apply with a coarse flannel, rubbing well, then wash off with clean hot water, and dry carefully and thoroughly.

PEARL.—(1) The relative deputed to give the bride away has very little to do at the ceremony. He should stand at the bride's left hand during the service, and sign the register after the marriage. In this instance, as the wedding is to be at the hotel, the bride would enter the room where the ceremony is to be performed on the arm of her uncle, and he would give her away in the usual way. (2) The bride should stand during the service immediately behind the bride, and be ready to take the bouquet and gloves when handed to her. (3) There is no rule in regard to this, but it is customary for the bride's nearest relatives to have the privilege. The little book, "Marriage, Weddings, The Home," advertised in these columns, will give you the fullest information on all these points.

MILLY BROWN.—I am inclined to think that your friend does not wish to be remembered at the New Year, or, indeed, at any time, by you. Under the circumstances, I should certainly not send a New Year's card to him unless he sends one to you first. It is quite evident that the young gentleman does not wish to continue the intercourse, and the best thing you can do is to try and forget him, and all that has passed between you. You doubtless feel this slight very keenly just now, but time is a great healer, and in a shorter time than you think is possible at present, you will have ceased to long for his presence. I cannot quite see that the man is dishonourable. Apparently you were not engaged to be married, and although he "paid you a great deal of attention," it is possible that he meant it all in quite a friendly way, and when he left the district did not see the necessity for continuing the acquaintance; but of this you are the best judge.

CLARE.—You intended to be kind, but you were really cruel. Your unfortunate and needy cousin called upon you for aid, but instead of aid you gave her advice. A person of your years should know that advice is not so welcome as good and proper raiment to the individual who is suffering from the pangs of hunger and the shame which arises from the consciousness of being compelled to appear before her old friends in shabby garments. When a woman is weak, for lack of nourishment, and is forced to seek a loan that she may discard the rags which misfortune has compelled her to wear, she should be first fed and properly clothed before the good friend of her earlier and happier years proceeds to heartlessly upbraid her by recalling the extravagance, faults and errors which have caused her destitution. Be kind to her by at once relieving her necessities, and then, if you have advice to offer, of which you seem to have an overflowing fount, turn on the tap, and she will be the better able to endure and appreciate it.

THE LONDON READER is sent to any part of the world, post free Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence.

* * ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 50-52, LUDGATE HILL, E.C.

* * We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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